




THE
VILLAGE
CHAMPION
W · O · STODDARD



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2012 with funding from

The Institute of Museum and Library Services through an Indiana State Library LSTA Grant

Ralph P. Stoddard.
from his father.

Madison, New Jersey,
Christmas, 1903.

William O. Stoddard



PAT MURPHY'S TRAP

The Village Champion

By
W. O. STODDARD

*Author of "Boys of Bunker Academy," "On the Old
Frontier," "The Sword Maker's Son," etc.*



PHILADELPHIA
GEORGE W. JACOBS & CO.
PUBLISHERS

Copyright, 1903, by
GEORGE W. JACOBS & COMPANY
Published, September, 1903

Contents

| | | |
|-------|---|-----|
| I. | BARNABY LEARNS HIS NAME | 7 |
| II. | AN UNEXPECTED DUCKING | 17 |
| III. | MEETING OLD ASSOCIATES | 31 |
| IV. | THREE CONFERENCES AND THEIR RESULTS . . . | 43 |
| V. | ZEB'S OPINION OF APPLE SPROUTS | 56 |
| VI. | BARNABY CALLS ON THE DOCTOR | 65 |
| VII. | HUNTING THE COWS | 78 |
| VIII. | AN UNEXPECTED MEETING | 98 |
| IX. | ZEB'S FAME PRECEDES HIM | 114 |
| X. | THE PUZZLED PROFESSOR | 124 |
| XI. | WILLING HANDS | 134 |
| XII. | NEWLY FOUND FRIENDS | 146 |
| XIII. | THE HAUNTED HOUSE | 160 |
| XIV. | A SHARPER OUTWITTED | 172 |
| XV. | THE MYSTERY OF THE DUN HEIFER | 187 |
| XVI. | A MESS OF FISH | 199 |
| XVII. | SKANIGO LAKE | 206 |

| | | |
|---------|--|-----|
| XVIII. | MAJOR MONTAGUE'S PLANS THWARTED . . . | 218 |
| XIX. | A NOCTURNAL ESCAPADE | 231 |
| XX. | THE BOXING MATCH | 242 |
| XXI. | GEORGE BRAYTON'S DRIVE | 254 |
| XXII. | GHOSTS IN THE ACADEMY BELFRY | 265 |
| XXIII. | THE BELL MYSTERY REMAINS UNSOLVED . . | 281 |
| XXIV. | MAJOR MONTAGUE HAS A VISITOR | 288 |
| XXV. | MR. ASHBEL NORTON | 301 |
| XXVI. | A FEW SURPRISING DISCLOSURES | 313 |
| XXVII. | THE FISHING PARTY | 327 |
| XXVIII. | TWO IMPORTANT TELEGRAMS | 342 |
| XXIX. | THE BLACK VALISE IS OPENED | 350 |
| XXX. | THE ACADEMY "GHOST" DISCOVERED . . . | 359 |
| XXXI. | GOOD NEWS FOR BAR | 369 |
| XXXII. | HOME AGAIN | 379 |

Illustrations

| | |
|---|-----------------------|
| Pat Murphy's Trap | <i>Frontispiece</i> |
| Zeb's Fight with the Rodney Boys | <i>Facing Page 94</i> |
| "How did Zeb Fuller get that heifer into the Academy?" | " " 196 |
| "He'd ha' found it out, if it had't been for me" | " " 282 |
| "Because he forgot to ask me" | " " 348 |

The Village Champion

CHAPTER I

BARNABY LEARNS HIS NAME

IT was towards the end of a very hot summer, and all the human population of that crowded square of the great city had spent the first half of the night in the streets. Either that, or in leaning halfway out of their windows to get a breath of fresh air.

Now that sunrise was again so near at hand, however, and the breeze from the sea had done so much to make the world more comfortable to live in, the closely-built "hotels" and tenement houses were all asleep.

The former were mostly of the sort that sell lager beer and other things in the basement, and the latter were just the kind of places in which men and women ought not to live.

Up in the third-story front room of one of those hotels, however, a boy of about seventeen—a well-built, dark-eyed, curly-headed, handsome boy—sat on a wooden-seated chair, wide-awake, and seemed to be studying the condition of somebody who lay on the bed near him.

There was a curiously-set expression of determination on the bright, young face, very much as if he had made up his mind to do something, and did not mean to be very long in going about it.

Such a ludicrously disreputable looking mess of a man was the large figure that now began to kick about so clumsily among the bedclothes!

He had not taken off his clothes on lying down, and every one might have wondered what need he had of extra blankets in such weather.

But now a grizzled head and a bloated face rose slowly from the pillow—one of those faces which defy any guess of within twenty years of their actual age.

“Jack—Jack Chills!”

“That isn’t my name, but here I am,” responded the boy in the chair.

“No more it is. Alas, for all my sins!” exclaimed the man, “but you cannot deceive

your old uncle, my boy. I know what you're up to. You mean to take advantage of my temporary indisposition and abandon me!"

"That's it," said the boy, curtly. "It'll be two or three days before you get sober enough to follow me, and I'm off."

"I deserve it, I do," was the mournful whine of the man on the bed. "I ought never to have brought you to this."

"I've seen you before," said the boy, "when you were sick and sorry. You brought me, years and years ago, but I'm older now and I don't mean to stay any longer."

"What will Monsieur Prosper say when he knows it? He expects great things of you now the troupe's broken up."

"Glad it's gone to pieces," half savagely remarked the youngster. "I don't want any more of that. What's more, I won't pick pockets or cheat at cards, or that sort of thing, for old Prosper or you either."

"Oh! alas!" came from the bed, but whether in repentance or disappointment it would be hard to say.

"Now," said the boy, in a tone of quiet deter-

mination, "I've been Jack Chills long enough ; tell me what my real name is."

"My dear nephew ——"

"If you're really my uncle, you must know, and if you won't tell, I'll empty the ice water all over you."

"And kill me ?"

"No ; it won't kill you, but it's awful cold," said the boy, as he advanced towards the bed with a large pitcher in his hand. "Come, now, I must be off before sunrise. Don't tell me any whopper now. Out with it."

"Oh !" burst in half-frightened accents from the helpless red-face ; but then a very different look began to creep across it.

"Barnaby Vernon , my boy."

"Is that my name ?"

"It was your father's before you, and you're coming out just like him. I reckon it's that that fetches me now. Bar Vernon, if you make me one promise, I'll be fair with you."

"Now that I know my own name, I'll promise anything," excitedly exclaimed Barnaby.

"Well, then—quick now, listen, before I change my mind—you see that little black valise ?"

"Seen it a thousand times," said Bar.

"That's yours, but you must promise not to open it for a year and a day. I'll be either dead or a thousand miles from here then."

"Most likely dead," growled Bar, who evidently bore small affection to his big relative. "But I'll promise. Will it tell me anything?"

"Everything; but, Barnaby, not for a year and a day! You always kept your word, just like your father."

"I'll keep it," said Bar, firmly, "and now, good-bye, Major Montague, if that's your name—only it isn't. I can't say I forgive you exactly, but we'll part friends. No more acrobat and juggling and tight-rope and wonderful performances for me."

"But what'll you do? 'Twon't be long before you'll be hunting me up again."

"Guess not," said Bar. "My clothes are pretty good, and I've collected my last six months' wages out of the money you gave me when you came in last night. There's a receipt for it, and there's the rest of the money. You'll find it all right."

"Wages? Receipt? Jack Chills!" almost screamed Major Montague.

"Exactly," said Bar. "I've stopped working

for nothing and being knocked down for it; good-bye, old fellow."

So saying, Barnaby Vernon, for he somehow felt safe about so calling himself, picked up a very well-filled leather traveling bag with one hand and the mysterious little valise with the other, and started for the door.

"Jack Chills! Barnaby! Come back with that money! I'll have you arrested! I'll strangle you!"

"Stop that noise," replied Bar, "or I'll douse you all over."

"Barnaby!"

"There, then if I must!"

Barnaby had put down the valise and caught up the pitcher, and the voice of the man on the bed died away in a wretched sort of shivering whine as the chilly flood came swashing down upon him.

"How he does hate water," muttered Bar, as he again seized his new-found property, and glided out into the passageway. Neither voice nor pursuing feet came after him, for Major Montague was struggling frantically, like a man with the hydrophobia, to divest himself of his saturated

habiliments, and his rum-destroyed strength was by no means equal to the task.

“That’s what rum’ll do if it gets a fair hold of a man,” said Barnaby to himself, on the stairs. “He must have been a gentleman once, and look at him now! None of it for me. I don’t like that kind of an ending, if you please.”

He stepped into the bar-room office on the first floor, for he had no intention of “sneaking,” but not a soul was there, and in another moment he was in the deserted, gloomy, sordid-looking street.

“Plenty of time,” he said to himself. “I’m going to start fair. I must go to my hotel from the ferry, in the regular coach with the passengers from the Philadelphia morning train.”

Barnaby Vernon had taken his lesson of life in a hard school, thus far, and he had done an amount of thinking for himself which does not often fall to the share of boys of his age. He knew very well that no questions would be asked of a “regular passenger” who looked well, and who brought his baggage with him.

Two hours later, he came out from breakfast at a respectable, but not too expensive hotel, on the

other side of the city, as quiet and self-possessed a young fellow as the sharp-eyed clerk had ever seen in his life.

“Looks as if he knew his own business, and meant to mind it,” was the sufficient commentary of the latter.

If any of the sharpers who lie in wait for the young and unwary set his eyes on Barnaby that morning, he speedily took them off again, for his instincts must have told him plainly, “Not a cent to be made out of that fellow.”

Under Barnaby’s external composure, however, there was more than a little of inner fermentation.

“All right, so far,” he said to himself. “The old rascal will take it for granted that I’ve left the city. Once his penitent fit is over, he’ll be sure to go for me again. I ain’t half sure but what I’d better go to Europe or California, only a hundred dollars isn’t quite enough for that. What’ll I do?”

He was not so unwise as to spend his time around the hotel, however, and he carried his mental puzzle with him on two or three short trips on the Sound steamers and up the Hudson.

"I've a name of my own," he said to himself, as he returned to his hotel from the last of these, "and I've got rid forever of that horrible old time, but what shall I do with my 'New Time'? I must settle that before my funds run out. They'd last longer in the country."

No doubt of that, but what was he to do in the country?

There had been work enough cut out for him in town, of a kind that he knew how to go about, and very remarkable had been the discussion thereof by the bedside of "Major Montague," some three or four hours after Barnaby's escapade.

"Might set the police after him, on account of that money," said a tall, thin, foreign-looking man, in a tone of deep dejection.

"The police, Prosper?" exclaimed the major. "I guess not. The less you say to them the better. They understand your kind of French."

"He'd make a better hand than any of us, in time," groaned Prosper.

"He's cut his stick, though, as far as we are concerned," added a third, a dapper little fellow, who stood by Prosper's chair. "I'm glad he's gone before he learned too much."

“He knows enough now,” said the major, “but I don’t believe he’ll do us any harm. He isn’t any common kind of boy, and we never could have kept him in hand. I tell you, he’ll be bossing a crowd of his own before a great while.”

“But I mean to have the use of him for a while first,” said Prosper, “if I can only lay my hands on him !”

“Better not try,” said the major.

“He may come back of his own accord,” said the third man.

“You hold your breath till he does,” kindly remarked the major.

It was a doleful sort of conference; and the high opinion of Barnaby Vernon’s, *alias* Jack Chills’s, capacity in their peculiar line which that trio entertained was expressed in language decidedly too powerful to be reported.

CHAPTER II

AN UNEXPECTED DUCKING

JUST about the time that Barnaby Vernon sat down to his first breakfast at his hotel, old Gershom Todderley, the fat and crusty miller of Ogleport, stood, with his hands in his pockets, halfway between the dam and the sawmill, jerking wheezy, angry sentences at the head of his Irish foreman.

“Mister Murphy, I say. Those rascally boys again. They’ve put up another spring-board. Twenty times I’ve forbidden ’em to bathe in my pond. Saw it off, sir. Close up. They’ll be here again this afternoon. So’ll I, sir. Saw it off. We’ll see, sir.”

And the wheezy miller put on all the dignity that he knew how, as he turned away towards his own breakfast, although the only reply from the dusty-looking Mr. Murphy was a subdued and doubtful:

“’Dade, an’ I’ll do that same, the day, sir.”

The moment his employer was fairly out of ear-shot, however, a droll expression crept across the merry face of the Irishman.

“‘Dade, an’ I’m glad the owld curmudgeon didn’t know I put it there mesilf. Sure, an’ the lake’s bettther for ’em, but it’s a mile away, and the pond’s clane and handy. It’ll spile the fun for the byes, but ordhers is ordhers. Anyhow, I’ll have some fun of me own wid ’em. They’ll niver suspect owld Pat of layin’ a thrap for ’em.”

It evidently went to the heart of the miller’s foreman to spoil fun of any kind, but he went straightway to the grist-mill for a hand-saw, and then, after a sharp look around, to be sure that he was not observed, he made a deep cross-cut on the under side of the long pine plank which he had so carefully set for the convenience of the young bathers of Ogleport.

The cut was close in, towards the frame of the old flume by which the plank was supported, and, while no one would have noted or suspected it, the thin bit of pine remaining on the surface was not a great deal more than was required to sustain the weight and apparent “spring” of the plank itself.

“There,” said Pat, as he put away his saw, “I hope the first feller that puts his fut on that same ’ll be a good swimmer. It’s twinty fate o’ wather he’ll drop in, not an inch the less.”

But Pat’s scrutiny of the “surrounding country,” keen as it was, had not been as complete as he imagined.

On the opposite shore of the deep and capacious mill-pond, where the bulrushes had grown so thickly up to the edge, and the willows had matted the sweeping boughs so very densely, every blackbird had left his perch some ten minutes earlier.

The birds had been better posted than Pat Murphy, and knew very well why they had winged it away so suddenly and unanimously, but Pat had failed to take the hint. Little he was thinking of those chattering loafers, the blackbirds, but every one of them had his own beady little eye on the stealthy movements of Zeb Fuller.

Not so very young or so small, either, was Zeb, only somewhat short and “stocky” in build, and the slight cast in one of his twinkling gray optics did not at all interfere with the per-

fection with which he squinted through the willows at what was going on at the spring-board.

"Going to saw it off, is he?" muttered Zeb. "Well, Pat Murphy never'd ha' done that unless the old man made him. No, he's just a-sawin' under it. If that ain't mean! Well, no, not exactly mean, but if Pat reckons he'll catch any of our crowd in that trap, he's a sold Irishman, that's all. Soon as he clears out, I'll cut around and give the boys the word. There won't one on 'em set foot on that there plank—you see if they do."

Zebedee Fuller was the last boy in the village to interfere with anything like a practical joke, and his warning to "the boys" did not go beyond his own particular set.

Still, the way in which the mill and the pond were watched, that day, was a lesson for the detective service.

The hour at which old Gersh Todderley started out in his antiquated buggy, and the hour of his return, as well as every "in and out" of Pat Murphy himself, were carefully noted by one youngster or another, nor did the discontented

blackbirds have a fair show at their willow-tree perches during all those weary hours of patient waiting.

At last, as the sun sank lower and lower in the west, the accustomed time arrived for such of the village boys as declined the long, hot walk to the lake, to trouble the smooth waters of the mill-pond and the unsympathizing soul of Gershiom Todderley.

Pat Murphy was somehow more than usually busy at the grist-mill; the saw of the saw-mill had been quiet for weeks.

There was really no reason why the boys should not have had a good time with their spring-board and the cool, cleansing, refreshing water—no reason at all but the dog-in-the-manger spirit of old Gersh Todderley.

But the accustomed squad of young “dolphins” forbade to come, for some cause or other, and Pat Murphy came to the north window of the mill, for the hundredth time, all in vain.

“Faix,” he said to himself, “it’s a pity to take so much trouble as all that for nothing. Sorra one on ’em’s showed himself near the pond the day.”

Even as he spoke, however, though he had turned back to his endless clatter and dust, and saw it not, the seeming solitude of the pond was being invaded.

Down the stream, from the bushes that concealed its winding course through the valley above, there drifted a clumsy, scow-built punt, the pride of Zeb Fuller's heart, and in it with him were three of his most trusted friends, for, only three minutes before, Zeb had been advised by a trusty scout of a very important and promising occurrence.

Not only had the miller returned, but he had been met at his very gate by the Rev. Solomon Dryer, D. D., Principal of Ogleport Academy, and the two men were actually approaching the mill together.

"Old Sol hasn't anything to do with us in vacation, boys," said Zeb, to his friends, "and I move we strip and go right in. We can keep out in the middle, you know, and they can't get at us. The other boys can keep hid behind the willows and see the fun."

The road from the miller's house gave a good view of the pond at several points; and before

he and his dignified companion had made half the distance, they saw such goings on upon the water as led even the fat and wheezy man of lumber and flour to double his perspiring pace and his wrath at the same time.

“Those boys, Doctor! See them? In the boat! That’s defiance. On my own pond. Defiance, sir. What are we coming to? What’s your authority worth, or mine? Glad I had the spring-board cut off. We must see about this, sir.”

“Indeed, my dear sir,” calmly and frigidly responded the head of the village institution, “I fully sympathize with you, but I think my presence will be sufficient. I have long been accustomed to repress these rebellious ebullitions. I will go with you with pleasure.”

“Right, sir; knew you would. Stop ’em. Make my pond a bathing-tub before my very eyes, sir.”

And now, while the lyers-in-wait behind the willows were half-bursting with envy of their more fortunate fellow-conspirators in the boat, the doctor and the miller puffed their consequential way to the open space on the old flume frame, between the dam and the sawmill.

What a view that spot commanded of the peaceful mill-pond and of the audacious iniquity of those boys!

Nearer and nearer drifted the boat, while the white-skinned rebels plunged from its rocking sides and disported themselves boisterously and undisguisedly in all directions, as if ignorant of the approach of any authority higher than their own desire for a good swim.

It was to the last degree tantalizing and irritating, but, just as Gershom Todderley found breath to sing out, "You young rascals!" his eyes fell upon the mocking and obnoxious length of the spring-board, and he exclaimed:

"Doctor, do you see that! I'll discharge him! He hasn't cut it off. That Irishman!"

"Isn't that what the boys denominate a spring-board?" asked the doctor.

"That's it, sir. I told Pat Murphy to cut it off this very morning. They walk out to the end of that, sir, and tilter up and down, and then jump into the water."

"Is there no danger of its breaking and drowning them?" asked the doctor.

"Drown 'em! Drown so many pickerel," ex-

claimed the miller. "No, sir. Hold up a ton, sir. Why, it's clear white pine. Stole it from me, most likely. Walk out on it. Try it yourself, Doctor."

"I? Oh, no, indeed," responded the doctor. "That would never do. I weigh very little, to be sure, but I could not think of such a thing."

As the learned gentleman drew his thin and wizened form back to its most dignified uprightness, however, a riotous yell and splash from Zeb and his friends stirred the blood of the miller to the very bounds of endurance.

"Come on, boys," shouted Zeb; "let's have a jump from the board, and show 'em what we can do."

The face of the miller grew red, and he actually drew a long breath as he strode forward.

He knew too well the strength of a two-inch pine plank to have any misgivings, and, just as a wild shout rang out from the window of the grist-mill, and Pat Murphy sprang insanely through it to the great heap of sour "bran" beneath, Gershon Todderley gave the treacherous wood the full benefit of his overfed weight.

Even then the tough pine held its own for a step or two.

“You young rascals.”

Crack!

A wild spreading out of fat arms, a wheezy shriek of fear, a tremendous splash in the calm, deep water, and Gershom Todderley had received the full benefit of Pat Murphy's trap.

“The boat, boys!” shouted Zeb.

“Quick, now, or the old porpoise will drown himself. Pity we didn't bring a harpoon along.”

Four naked boys were in the boat in less than no time, and while the Rev. Solomon Dryer stood on the flume, helplessly opening and shutting his mouth, without uttering a sound, Zeb and his heroes pulled vigorously to the rescue. They would have been there in plenty of time, too, but Pat Murphy, forgetting, in his conscience-stricken excitement, that he could not swim a stroke, had made no pause at the brink, but had gone in, heels over head, to fish for his employer.

There was double work cut out for Zeb and his friends, and the willows on the opposite shore were alive with a chorus which never came from the throats of blackbirds.

The miller may have been a selfish man, but he was neither a coward nor a fool, and when, on coming to the surface for the second time, he found an oar-blade poked into his well-covered ribs, he had quite sense enough to cling to it and be pulled to the side of the boat.

"That'll do," said Zeb. "You'll tip us over if you try to climb in. You're safe enough, now, and we'll pull you ashore. I'm going for poor Pat Murphy."

Pat was by no means so easy to manage, but in a couple of minutes more the boys had him upon the other side of the boat, making a very good counterpoise for the miller.

"Now, Dr. Dryer," exclaimed Zeb, "we're only waiting for you. You needn't stop to strip. Neither Pat nor old Todderley did. Come right in. Water's nice and cool."

"Young man," solemnly remarked the doctor, "your levity is most reprehensible. I hope for an opportunity of inspiring you with a greater degree of reverence."

"Boys," said Zeb, "we'll let Pat and old Todderley go. They've had a good ducking. But we must drown the doctor. It's our last chance."

Whether or not the man of learning had any fears of their carrying out the proposition, it was received with such a yell of what he deemed irreclaimable ferocity, that he immediately turned his stately steppings away from the unhallowed margin of the mill-pond, and the boys were left to finish their work of rescue alone.

It was easy enough to pull the boat into shallow water, where Pat and the miller could find footing and wade ashore, but Zeb Fuller had got a new idea in his head.

The miller had been obstinately silent ever since his bald head rose above the water, and now Zeb turned upon him reproachfully, with :

“I saw you, Mr. Todderley, or I’d never have believed it. Who’d have thought such a thing of you, a deacon in the church ! And old Sol Dryer, too ! Setting such a trap as that to drown poor boys, just for swimming in your pond. What do you think the village will say to it ? What’ll the church say ! You’re a poor, miserable sinner, but you haven’t the heart to drown boys, like so many puppies. You fell into your own trap, Gershom Todderley, and we’ve returned good for

evil by saving your life. Go home and dry yourself."

"Hark to him! Listen to him, the now!" exclaimed Pat, in open admiration. "Ownly eighteen! Ownly two winters in a debatin' society, and he can lie like that. What a lawyer he'll make one of these days!"

And the fat old miller stood dripping on the grassy margin for a moment before he could gather his wits or breath for anything, but then he said:

"Pat Murphy, set the boys a new board. A good strong one. Must have been an awful knot in that other."

"Is it another trap?" sternly inquired Zeb Fuller.

"Zeb, my boy," returned the miller, "I don't exactly understand it, but I am thankful I wasn't drowned. I think I'll go to meeting to-night. You need it, too, Zeb. You and the boys may swim all over the pond, all day, summer or winter."

"Thank you, Gershom," replied the incorrigible Zeb, "and if you meet old Sol Dryer, tell him to go to meeting, too. He's had a very narrow escape from drowning."

“The young pirate!” exclaimed Pat. “Indade, Mr. Todderley, it’s home ye’d betther be goin’, an’ I’d loike a dhry rag or two on me own silf.”

The miller turned very soberly away, the worst puzzled man in Ogleport that day, but Zeb was right when he turned to his companions, and said:

“Boys, I reckon it won’t hurt him. He didn’t know it was Pat’s work, and we must keep the secret.”

Not a bit of hurt had come to the miller externally, and more than a little good internally, but there were altogether too many boys in that “secret” for it to keep any length of time.

CHAPTER III

MEETING OLD ASSOCIATES

IT was nearly a week after the beginning of Bar Vernon's "new time," and he had never enjoyed anything so thoroughly in all his life, that he returned to his hotel from one of his pleasure trips.

By this time he had struck up a sort of an acquaintance with the clerk, although that gentleman confessed to himself that he had never before fallen in with a boy of that age who behaved so very well and talked so very little.

"Mr. Vernon," he said to our hero, that afternoon, "there's been a gentleman in to see you twice while you were gone—a Major Montague."

"Sorry to hear that," said Bar.

"Why so? He seems a well got-up, rather fine-looking man."

"Can't help that," said Bar.

"Claimed to be a relative of yours, and seemed quite anxious to see you."

“So he is, I suppose,” replied our hero, “but he’s a disreputable old fellow, for all that, and I’m sure my father would not wish me to have anything to do with him. Drinks like a fish.”

“Must say he looks a little on that order,” remarked the clerk. “So we’re not to put him on your track?”

“Not if you can help it,” said Bar, carelessly. “The family doesn’t recognize him at all, and I don’t want to.”

Bar was perfectly sure, in his own mind, that he was telling the exact truth, but it was the first mention he had made of father or family, and, while it made his heart and fingers tingle very curiously and pleasantly, it did not by any means diminish the respect with which he was regarded, for the keen-eyed official was the last man in the world to be taken in by such a face as that of Major Montague.

He had read him through and through at a glance, and had wondered what he could have to do with a quiet, self-respecting young gentleman like Barnaby Vernon.

Bar strolled away into the reading-room, muttering to himself:

“So he has hunted me up. Saw my name on the hotel register, most likely. Now, I’ll have to get away from this. He’d be sure to make trouble for me. Then he belongs to that horrid old time, and I don’t want anything to do with it. Somehow, I feel as if something were about to happen to me, and I don’t exactly know what to do with myself. Guess I’ll go on an exploring tour, but I’ll fix it so none of that set ’ll know me if I come across ’em.”

No doubt there had been something of theatrical experience in Barnaby’s “old time,” for he seemed to know precisely what to do.

He walked out of the hotel in a very decent suit, of which the coat and waistcoat were dark, and the trousers light-gray, but before he had gone a block, he had bought and put on a loose linen duster.

Then at a hat-store he purchased a high black silk “stove-pipe,” to replace the straw he had been wearing.

At another shop he bought a pair of black-rimmed glasses. Then a neat mustache appeared on his upper-lip, a college society pin on his neck-tie, a little cane in his hand, and thus attired he

could have passed muster anywhere as a young collegian of the first water, and even old "Prosper" himself might have passed him without a suspicion of his identity.

He turned aside after that, from the busier thoroughfares, for he felt the need of a little thinking, and quickly found himself sauntering in front of a gray-stone building, facing an open square thickly dotted with trees.

"I know," he said to himself, "that's the old University. I wish I knew all the things they teach there. Never was at school in my life, but I've picked up a good deal, for all that."

Bar was only half right.

He had been in a terrible school, indeed, and had grown to be a remarkable sort of fellow, simply by refusing to learn the evil part of the lessons his "professors" had tried to teach him.

Still, he was greatly in need of the other kind of "lessons," and he felt it bitterly, as he stood and looked up at the gray stone building.

His attention was suddenly diverted by a loud exclamation not many paces from him, and he turned in time to see a shabbily dressed fellow

pick up from the sidewalk what seemed to be a very heavy and well-filled pocketbook.

"Some old trick," Bar was saying to himself, when the stranger turned to him with the pocketbook in his hand, remarking, furtively :

"Big find that, sir. Just see how full it is. No end of bank notes, and all big ones. There'll be a whopping reward offered for it."

"You're in luck, I should say, then," drawled Bar, in his character of collegian. "Of course you'll advertise it?"

"Yes, sir, ought to be advertised," rattled the stranger ; "but I can't stay to do it. I'm off for Boston to-night. Couldn't stay on any account. Tell you what I'll do. You look like a gentleman. Feel sure you'll see that the right man gets it. Square and honest. You take it and divide the reward. Won't be less'n a hundred, sure's you live."

"Not less than that, certainly," drawled Bar. "Let me look at it?"

"No right to open it, I s'pose," said the stranger quickly, as Bar poised the pocketbook in his open hand.

"No," said Bar. "Private papers, perhaps.

No business of ours, you know. All right, you give me your Boston address and I'll send you your half soon as I get it."

So saying, Bar slipped the prize into his inside coat-pocket with a movement so nearly instantaneous that there was no chance for any interference, but the stranger's countenance fell in spite of himself as he stammered :

"Well, no, sir, that won't do, exactly. I'm going on North from Boston. Tell ye what I'll do. You give me fifty dollars down. It's good security for that. You may get five hundred, for all I know. You keep it all and it'll only cost you fifty. You didn't find it, you know. It was all my luck."

"Don't think I've got so much as that about me," said Bar, with a quick glance up the street.

"Forty, then. Only be quick about it, or I shall lose my train."

"Haven't got forty," drawled Bar.

"Thirty, then, and that's awful low," pleaded the stranger, anxiously.

"Thirty dollars is a good deal of money to risk," considered Bar.

“Twenty-five, then. Say twenty, or give me back the pocketbook.”

“Why,” said Bar, beaming benignly on the stranger, through his new spectacles, “it isn’t your pocketbook. I’ve been considering the matter, and I’ve decided to turn the property over to the police authorities. There’s a policeman now, just turned the corner.”

A great oath burst from the lips of the stranger, which were white with rage and disappointment, but Bar had buttoned his coat over the pocketbook and was standing in an attitude which looked very much as if he had learned it from a boxing-master.

There was no joke about the approach of the policeman, however, and one look at his blue coat and brass buttons seemed quite enough for the stranger. At all events, he swore another ugly oath, shook his fist savagely at Bar, and darted briskly away across the square.

“Anything the matter, sir?” asked the policeman, as he stepped quickly up to our hero.

“Can’t say,” drawled Bar, “but I’m half inclined to think that gentleman had improper designs. I do not like his appearance and

have declined to transact any business with him."

"That's right, sir. Well known—bad character. Strangers can't be too much on their guard," responded the representative of the law, as a broad grin spread across his face.

When he had walked on a few steps, however, he growled to himself :

"Wonder what game it was ? Anyhow, that prig in spectacles isn't the sort that'll be swallowed whole. Sometimes those green-looking, respectable chaps knows more'n we think they do, and where on earth they can pick it up beats me."

As for Bar Vernon, he turned once more towards the great thoroughfare, only remarking :

"That fellow don't come up to Major Montague. Now, what'll I do with the pocketbook ? It's a right good one, and I must see what it's stuffed with."

It was not difficult to find an out-of-the-way corner, and Bar quickly satisfied himself that his prize contained little more than a few coarse counterfeits, a lot of fanciful advertising cards, in the shape of bank-notes, and enough wrap-

ping-paper to fill out the pile and make it look "rich." The book itself was of the best Russia leather, however, and well calculated to catch the eye of such a "greenhorn" as he had been mistaken for.

On, now slowly, now hurried by the afternoon uptown tide of foot-passengers, strolled Barnaby, until, right in front of one of the busiest retail commercial establishments, he saw a sudden flurry in the crowd, and a rapid coming together as if one spot on the sidewalk had acquired an overpowering attraction.

"Another game?" asked Bar of himself, but he pushed his way vigorously through the throng, nevertheless, as determined as anybody to learn the meaning of it all.

It was by no means the easiest thing in the world, for there was really a good deal of excitement.

"Awful fit!" exclaimed one.

"Fell right flat and began to kick without a word."

"Lucky for him that Dr. Manning happened on hand so quickly."

"Best doctor in the city."

A shower of remarks reached Bar's ears from all sides, but he could not divest himself of a feeling which made him extremely watchful, and he almost instinctively kept one hand upon his very worthless prize, as if it contained a fortune.

He was "two or three deep" back in the crowd from the central point where the sufferer was supposed to be lying, and around him were men of every sort, seeming pretty closely wedged in.

Sharp as was the watch which Bar was keeping, he very nearly missed seeing the deft and dexterous passage from hand to hand of a wallet which seemed the very counterpart and image of the one in his own pocket, but it disappeared in the capacious outer garment of a tall, thin, foreign-looking gentleman at his side.

The thought flashed through Bar's brain with a rapidity compared to which lightning is a stage-coach, and his fingers moved with only less quickness and with marvelous skill.

"The weight must be about the same," thought Bar, "and he'll never know the difference. It's splendid fun to have got in on old Prosper himself. The Major must be inside there somewhere.

No, there go both of them, making off as fast as they can."

Just then a clear and somewhat scornful voice arose above the rest, exclaiming :

"Get up, you wretched fraud. There's nothing at all the matter with you. Don't give him a cent, gentlemen, if that's what he's after. He's no more in a fit than you and I are."

"Hurrah for the doctor!" shouted a somewhat youthful bystander, but the physician, a tall, fine-looking, benevolent-faced gentleman, forced his way to the edge of the sidewalk, sprang into a carriage which seemed to be waiting for him, and drove away, with the disgusted air of a professional man whose sympathies had been imposed upon.

He had not been deceived, however, except for the first few moments, by even the admirable acting of the halfway genteel scamp, who now picked himself up so sheepishly and sneaked around the corner amid the jeers of the wayfarers, just in time to evade the fingers of the police.

"It was a regular put-up job," exclaimed Bar, as he walked away. "Anyhow, it won't be difficult for me to find out who this thing belongs to.

Maybe it's the doctor himself, only I can't see how he should have such a thing about him and push right into a crowd with it."

Bar had not seen the doctor's carriage pull up as it did, with the first intimation that a human being might be in need of his skill, nor could he know how completely such an affair, in the first place, and his chagrin at being "sold," in the second, had driven out of the worthy doctor's mind for the moment all other considerations.

For all that, however, Dr. Manning's carriage was in front of police headquarters in less than an hour from that time.

CHAPTER IV

THREE CONFERENCES AND THEIR RESULTS

THERE were three very important conferences held that evening.

The first was by Barnaby Vernon with himself.

As he walked down-town, towards his hotel, off came the mustache, the glasses, the pin, one after another, and then even the duster was removed and thrown over his arm.

He had left his straw hat "to be called for," and now he went into the store and put it on again, ordering the tall silk hat to be delivered at the hotel.

There was, therefore, on his return, no perceptible difference in his exterior, and he had no fears whatever that Major Montague would make his appearance very soon.

After supper, however, he retired to his own room, for a good solid "think" over the events of the day.

"No," he said at last, "there's no sort of ques-

tion about the honesty of it, bad as it would have looked if anybody had seen me do it. Still it was a terribly dangerous experiment, and I'll never try anything of the sort again, even to keep a man from being robbed. I might just have collared old Prosper, and shouted 'Police !' Then it never would have been found on him, and I'd have made a fool of myself. But what'll I say to the owner ? I won't own to any connection with that gang. We'll see about it when the time comes. Maybe he'll be glad enough to get his money back without asking any questions. Now for a look at it, and to find out to whom it belongs."

The door of the room was safely locked and bolted, and Bar sat down with a strange kind of a trouble all over him, and drew from his bosom the treasure of which he had so singularly obtained possession.

It must have been made at the same shop as the one left in his hands by the "pocketbook-dropper" that morning, and Bar could not help wondering whether that baffled swindler would soon succeed again in rigging up so very taking a bait.

Three Conferences and Their Results 45

“He’ll end his days in the penitentiary,” muttered Bar, “and so’ll all the rest of ’em. I’d rather not go that way, if you please. Hullo! what’s this?”

Thousand-dollar bills, ten of them. Others of smaller denominations, comparatively, but all large. Checks and drafts for ten times as much more.

Business memoranda and receipts, which, even to Bar’s inexperienced eye, were evidently of great importance, and there could be no manner of doubt that the whole belonged to Dr. Randall Manning, the great physician.

“Glad he’s so rich,” muttered Bar. “And to think of such a man going in to help a poor fellow that fell in a fit on the sidewalk! How mad he must have been when he found he had been cheated! Yes, and what did he say or think when he found all this among the missing. I see. That gang played for him on purpose, and they played it wonderfully well. Hope they’ll be happy over their winnings. Why, I shall hardly dare go to sleep to-night with all this in my room. Only nobody’d dream of trying to rob a boy like me. Not worth robbing, and

that's a comfort just now. I'll go to the doctor's the first thing in the morning. Why not to-night? It's early yet. No, he won't be at home this evening. He'll be hunting all over the city to see if he can get on the track of his property."

Barnaby was only half right, and his better course would have been to go at once, for although the worthy doctor did employ his evening till a late hour, too, in the manner the quick-witted boy had imagined, he was just then at home and would have been glad enough to welcome such a visitor as Bar would have been.

Moreover, Bar himself might have had some chance for a good night's sleep, instead of lying wide awake, as he did, hugging his precious wallet.

Perhaps, however, that night's wakefulness, as the guardian of another man's property, with all the thoughts it brought to the mind of the lonely and friendless boy, may have been of special service, and Bar's decision may have been for the best, after all.

At all events, when morning came, Bar had fully made up his mind as to the course he meant

Three Conferences and Their Results 47

to take, and it was scarcely the same he would have chosen if he had acted on the spur of the moment.

The second "conference" that evening began at the same time with Bar's, but it did not last all night.

It was held in the elegantly furnished library of Dr. Manning, and the parties to it were an elderly-looking, intellectual-seeming gentleman, and the doctor himself.

The former was no less a man than Dr. Manning's legal counsel, who had called for a very different piece of business from the one before him now.

He had evidently been listening to his client's account of his misfortune, and his face expressed almost as much indignation as sympathy.

"You see, Judge," urged the doctor, "I felt that I ought to take it while I could get it. He was to go on board the steamer at six o'clock, and it seemed like my last chance. He means to be honest, you know, but he's so speculative and uncertain. He signed over the checks and drafts, and paid me the money, just as if he had never intended to do anything else."

"You could have had him arrested," snapped the judge.

"Arrested, Judge Danvers? The very thing I did not want to do. Besides, how could I, when he turned upon me so frankly and said, 'There's your money just as I collected it, every cent,' and paid it squarely into my hands."

"No telling what he has that belongs to other men. You were not his only victim."

"Never thought of that," said the doctor. "Anyhow, I received my money."

"And lost it on your way home," growled the judge.

"I hope not," replied the doctor. "I've already sent advertisements to all the newspapers. The finder could not use the checks and drafts, even if he were dishonest, and my wallet was marked inside with my address in full."

"Finder!" petulantly exclaimed the judge. "Why, Doctor, you've had your pocket picked. Do you suppose your reward—a thousand dollars I think you said—will make a pickpocket send back your greenbacks? Of course, you can stop payment of the other things, if you're quick enough. I'll take care of that myself, but how

Three Conferences and Their Results 49

are we ever to get at the money, I'd like to know? It's a pretty kettle of fish. You say you took a carriage and rode all the way home?"

"Yes," replied the doctor, almost meekly, "it was after bank hours or I'd have deposited the whole thing at once. So I took a carriage and hurried home, meaning to lock it up in my own safe here, over night, and deposit it in the bank in the morning."

"But didn't you stop, anywhere?"

"No—yes—well, I did get out just for a minute in front of Stewart's, to look at a fellow they said had tumbled in a fit on the sidewalk. He was a complete fraud. No fit at all."

"I see," exclaimed the judge. "If I could only get hold of that make-believe epileptic."

"What do you mean?"

"Mean? Why, there was a crowd, of course, all around you, behind you, close to you, as you leaned over your patient. The light-fingered gentry had it all their own way."

"Why, Judge, I saw half a dozen men I knew, and a more respectable-looking crowd you never saw. There were even ladies in it, just come out of Stewart's."

"Exactly," said the judge, "and I must see the police this very night again, and so must you. Send for a carriage, Doctor; we've no time to lose."

"Certainly," replied the doctor, as he rose from his chair, "but I've three or four patients I must look to on the way. Mustn't neglect them, you know, for any mere matter of money."

"Patients!" exclaimed the dry, hard man of law, but he gazed very admiringly on the true-hearted and high-principled physician for all that. "Yes, I'll help you 'tend cases all night. No other medicine man shall have the killing of me. To think of them under such circumstances!"

And so, a few minutes later, the doctor and the judge rode away together on their joint errand of healing, mercy, and pickpocket detection.

The third conference had taken place even earlier in the evening.

Such experienced hands as Prosper, Major Montague, and their colleagues, were not likely to come together at once, after such a remarkable exploit as they had performed, and they found

Three Conferences and Their Results 51

their way to their appointed rendezvous by circuitous routes, and one by one.

Moreover, even Prosper, mindful of the suspicious jealousy of his associates, did not dare to disturb the outer covering of his prey until the rest arrived, although his clawlike fingers worked around it, as it lay in his pocket, with a perfect ague-shake of mingled greed and curiosity.

The hour agreed upon was not likely to be oversteaid on such an occasion as that, and Prosper was in no danger of being long compelled to bear his temptation alone.

First came the little, dapper, sharp-visaged person who had made so good an imitation of a fit, then Major Montague, and, closely following him were two very well dressed, respectable-looking gentlemen, who had been conspicuous as active members of the "crowd" in front of Stewart's.

"Now, gentlemen," said Prosper, "we are all here and it may be there's no time to lose. We've made a magnificent haul, or I'm mistaken. There it is."

And so saying he threw down upon the table

before them the elegantly finished Russia leather wallet, which Barnaby Vernon had received from the "dropper" a few hours earlier, plump and full as when Bar had refused to "divide the reward" for it.

The eyes of the whole party glistened with expectation, and more than one of them drew a long breath and reached out an involuntary hand. It was by no means easy for such men to look upon a pocketbook like that and not lay a finger on it.

"Open it, Monsieur Prosper," said Major Montague, dignifiedly. "Let all witness the opening and feel sure of the exact justice of our mutual dealings."

A hum of approbation ran around the little circle as Prosper's unsteady fingers drew the strap and disclosed the precious contents to their admiring gaze.

"What's that?" almost instantly thereafter shouted Major Montague. "Prosper, you old villain, do you think you can play any such game on us?"

The chorus of wrath, indignation, bitterness, profanity that followed upon the major's "open-

Three Conferences and Their Results 53

ing" would have defied a dozen stenographers, and poor old Prosper bent tremblingly and helplessly before the storm, vainly protesting the truth that the wallet had not left his pocket until he laid it before them on the table.

No such assertion could be of any manner of service. Were they all fools? Had Dr. Manning rigged himself for the drop game? What had he done with the money?

And then came darker hints and threats, until Prosper, almost beside himself with rage, fear, and perplexity, actually stuck his head out of the open window and yelled:

"Police! police!" at the top of his voice.

The room behind him was empty in a moment, but Bar Vernon's afternoon work had resulted in forever disbanding what had threatened, from the skill and ability of its well-trained membership, to be one of the most dangerous gangs of rogues that ever infested the metropolis.

Prosper knew that he would thenceforth be a marked man, even among the thieving fraternity itself, and could hope for no more confederates.

The major had lost faith in humanity, and knew, besides, that all humanity had lost faith in

him, for it was more than intimated that he was suspected of collusion with Prosper.

The little dapper "fits" imitator declared that he had lost all ambition, and should at once return to his legitimate business of three-card monte.

As for the other two, they contented themselves for weeks with a vain attempt to dog the movements of their late associates, and learn what had become of the doctor's money.

The only man who made any profit out of the operation was the landlord of the "hotel," who found the wallet lying on the table after Prosper's half-frenzied exit, and sold it to a countryman for three dollars, applying that sum to the rent of the room.

Perhaps the bitterest moment undergone by any of them all, however, came to the share of Prosper himself, the next morning, when he read in the papers an offer of a thousand dollars reward for the return of that very wallet.

Then, indeed, he bowed his head in utter desolation, for the truth became only too clear to a mind so well trained as his own.

"Changed in the crowd!" he exclaimed.

Three Conferences and Their Results 55

“Got into the wrong hands. Somebody else will get the reward or keep the wallet!”

It was too much for human endurance, and for at least an hour the defeated pickpocket had serious thoughts of giving up everything and going to work for an honest living.

It looked a good deal as if even the evil one had turned against him, which is very much what every evil man is apt to make up his mind to, sooner or later.

CHAPTER V

ZEB'S OPINION OF APPLE SPROUTS

“ZEBEDEE, my son,” remarked old Deacon Fuller to that young gentleman, when he returned from driving the cows to pasture, the evening after the affair at the spring-board—“Zebedee, what is this I hear of your violent threats against the Rev. Dr. Dryer?”

The deacon was standing in the kitchen doorway, deliberately stripping the leaves from a handful of strong, well-grown apple-tree “suckers,” which he had recently gathered in the orchard back of the house.

For a moment Zeb stood in silence, eying the ominous-looking sprouts with a squint in which a very grave expression was beginning to make its appearance, and his father continued:

“Dr. Dryer has been here, himself, and he tells me you employed the most disrespectful and threatening language.”

“No, father,” said Zeb, stoutly, “no disrespect at all. I only wanted to drown him.”

"Drown him! Zebedee! Drown Dr. Dryer? Are you crazy?"

"Not a bit, father; it might be bad for him—just a little—but think what a splendid thing it would be for the Academy. We'll never get rid of him any other way."

Deacon Fuller was a parent of the genuine old Puritanic stock, and his weather-beaten face could put on all the iron sternness of his race and breeding, but behind every visage of that kind there is a strangely mellow something, and he was Zeb's father. Not a muscle quivered, but his only reply for a moment was:

"Zebedee!"

"Father," said Zeb, "did old Sol tell you the whole story? If he didn't I think I'd better."

"That would be just," remarked the deacon, and Zeb was in the middle of it before he had time to reconsider his opinion.

The story was not likely to lose much in Zeb's telling of it, and before it was half finished the deacon began to feel as if there was no other duty in the world so difficult to live up to as a wholesome degree of parental severity.

It was a critical moment, indeed, and Deacon

Fuller felt as if a powerful reinforcement had arrived when, just then, the front gate swung open and the pursy form of Gershom Todderley, the miller, came heavily up the path to the side of the house where Zeb and his sire were standing.

Brief, indeed, and somewhat embarrassed, were the mutual greetings, but Deacon Fuller's face was fast recovering its original rigidity, in spite of the pictures in his mind's eye of old Gershom going off the broken spring-board.

Zeb never yielded an inch of ground, and fairly astounded his father by holding out his hand with :

"You don't seem to be hurt a bit. I thought a good swim wouldn't do you any harm. I take one every day."

"Zeb," exclaimed the miller, "I mean to learn to swim. Deacon Fuller, he's an odd boy. Saved my life this afternoon. Made a fool of myself. Came over to thank you, soon as I could."

"Made a fool of yourself? Came to thank me? Why, neighbor Todderley, what do you mean? Some of Zeb's performances, I suppose.

I was just going to have a settlement with him. Dr. Dryer was here an hour ago."

"Old fool," exclaimed the miller, with some energy. "Wish he'd tried the board first. Lighter man than I am. Might not have broke with him. Hope it might. Stood there like a post. Never tried to help me. Zeb and the boys fished me out. Came to thank you and him."

"Oh," said the deacon, with a greatly relieved sigh, "that's it, is it? I thought it must all be some of Zeb's mischief. Come in, brother Todderley, come in."

"No, thank ye," replied the miller. "Got an errand up street. Hope I'll see you at meeting. Solemn thing to be drowned. Good-day."

And the miller turned on his heel, but Zeb's father once more bent his inquiring gaze upon his hopeful son.

"Zebedee, that's all very well, but what's this about Dr. Dryer?"

"Gersh Todderley's right about him too," said Zeb. "I've the greatest respect for his opinions, now's he's in his right mind. Glad he means to learn to swim. I wouldn't mind teaching him

myself. They say fat men float the easiest kind."

"Zebedee, I hardly know what course I ought to take."

The boy's face was again putting on a grave and serious look.

"Father," he said, pointing at the apple-tree sprouts, "what are those things for?"

"I think you ought to know by this time, my son."

"Well, yes," said Zeb, quietly, "I had some pretty good lessons years ago. May be it was just as well, too. But, father, how old am I now?"

"Eighteen, Zeb. Why do you ask such a question?"

"Eighteen!" slowly repeated Zeb. "Can't you think of anything better than apple-tree suckers for a boy of eighteen?"

"Zebedee!" exclaimed the astonished deacon.

"I just thought I'd ask the question," said Zeb, with a twinkle in his gray eyes which may not have been altogether fun. "Sprouts get to be trees, sometimes."

"And bear apples, and save men's lives—yes,

and teach lessons to their own fathers," exclaimed the deacon, as he threw the whole handful of rods over the nearest fence. "I was mistaken, Zeb. Go in and see your mother. I'm going to meeting. And—Zeb—I don't want any tree in my orchard to bear worthless apples."

Zeb went on into the house and his father out at the gate. It may be that both of them strongly suspected how completely every word had been drunk in by the listening, loving ears of good old Mrs. Fuller.

They owed a good deal to her, those two, father as well as son, and she had never looked with much favor on the apple-tree sprouts. Not, at least, since Zebedee reached his first very mischievous "'teens."

There was little danger that the orchard would ever again be drawn upon for Zeb's benefit.

The occurrences of the day, however, had been by no means private property.

Not only the crew of Zeb's boat, but the half-score of lyers-in-wait behind the willows had vigorously distributed varying versions of the affair, and the Rev. Dr. Solomon Dryer had aided them more than a little.

The latter, indeed, had found "company" awaiting him on his return home, and he had delivered the history of the dangers from which he had escaped to a half roomful of sympathizing auditors.

"Drown you!" exclaimed his better-half, through her firmly clinched false teeth—that is, if a man's third wife can fairly be considered so large a fraction of him as that—"drown you, my dear? Did the young ruffians go so far as that?"

At this point, however, the solemn-visaged matron was interrupted by a merry, ringing peal of laughter.

"Euphemia Dryer!"

"Effie, my own daughter! To think of your discerning, in such a matter, any sufficient occasion for levity!"

Neither the doctor's third wife nor the doctor himself seemed capable of expressing their astonishment, but the laughter was cut short with:

"Oh, papa, I didn't mean anything naughty, but I was thinking how funny it must have seemed to see old Mr. Todderley plump into the pond in that way. And how he and Pat

Murphy must have looked when they were pulled out. It's too funny for anything!"

Alas, for poor Effie, her rosy face and her mirth were both ordered out of the parlor, for Mrs. Dryer discerned that the latter had spread with dreadful rapidity among her guests.

Even then, however, Effie had no sooner disappeared than Mrs. Dryer kindly apologized for her.

"Young and giddy," she said, "and so thoughtless, just like her poor mother, the doctor's second, you know. She frequently loses control of her risible faculties."

"Poor thing!" remarked one of the ladies. "But what a very sweet face she has, and such a dear, pleasant way of laughing! You must find her quite a treasure."

"Yes, indeed," said another. "Girls will be girls. Mine are all so fond of Effie."

The doctor seemed to find it difficult to reproduce the subject of Zeb Fuller's enormity, but that was nothing to the effort it cost his wife to smile and look sweet while her visitors were praising her stepdaughter.

It is to be feared that Effie's tea-time was

a troubled one, but there were reasons why she was in no danger of unendurable severity just then, if she was as yet "under age" and capable of seeing the funny side of things.

After tea, the doctor had a brief call to make at Deacon Fuller's, from which he returned with a serene assurance that the young assailant of his dignity was not to escape without just and ample retribution, for he had seen, with his own eyes, the stern and exemplary father proceeding to the orchard for the necessary appliances.

"That will do," muttered the doctor, as he turned his steps once more homeward, "only I think hickory would be better in a case of this magnitude."

What would have been his feelings if he had witnessed the ignominious after-fate of even the "sprouts" he deemed so inadequate to the occasion?

But, then, Zeb Fuller was just as well satisfied.

CHAPTER VI

BARNABY CALLS ON THE DOCTOR

BAR VERNON was particularly anxious not to miss the doctor that next morning, if only because the precious wallet was becoming such a dreadful burden to carry.

"I wouldn't sleep with that thing another night," he said to himself, "not for the whole hotel,"—forgetting how very little slumbering he had really managed to do.

His anxiety, however, led him into a very judicious piece of extravagance. He could not think of either losing time or exposing himself to any perils by the way; and so he called the first good-looking "hack" carriage he saw empty after leaving the hotel, and was whirled up in front of Dr. Manning's elegant "brown-stone front," on one of the most fashionable up-town streets, in something like proper style.

For all that, however, the dignified servant who answered Bar's pull at the door-bell looked

down a little loftily on so very young and healthy-looking a "patient."

"Dr. Manning does not wish to see any one this morning——"

"Never mind that," interrupted Bar. "He is waiting for me. Just give him my name."

"Card, sir?"

"No card," said Bar. "Just tell him my name is Wallet, that's all."

The thoroughly mystified porter politely showed Bar into the doctor's reception-room and stalked away to the library with his message.

"Wallet? Wallet?" muttered the doctor, when he received it. "I don't know any such man. Did he say what was the matter with him?"

"Said as how you were waitin' for him, sir."

"Waiting for him? Wallet? Ah, yes, I see. How I wish Judge Danvers were here! John, go over for the judge at once. Tell him I want to see him immediately. Show Mr. Wallet in."

"In here, sir?"

"Yes, right away. Say to the judge it's very important."

Dr. Manning, on advice of his counsel, had

kept his loss of the night before, a secret from everybody but his wife, and the dignified porter had not the slightest idea of the tremendous meaning which might be lurking under the very simple name of the "cheeky" visitor.

Whatever may have been the sort of human being which the doctor had pictured to himself as likely to come on such an errand, he was manifestly astonished when our hero was ushered into the library.

"John" would have given something to have "fussed around" and learned a little more, but his master peremptorily hurried him off.

He had asked Bar to be seated, almost mechanically, but, as the door closed on John, he turned to him again with,

"Mr. Wallet?"

"There I am," said Bar, "all of me you care for, lying on the table."

There it was, sure enough, in all the glory of its Russia leather, and the good doctor drew a long sigh of relief as he picked it up.

"Where could I have lost it?" he said to himself, aloud. "The judge is clearly wrong about it. May I ask where you found it, Mr. ——"

"Vernon," said Bar. "The visitor you were waiting for was named Wallet. I'm only Barnaby Vernon. Please count your money, Doctor, and see that all the papers are there."

"Of course," exclaimed the good doctor, "I've no doubt of that, my young friend; there is that in your face which assures me."

"No, Doctor," said Bar, "that pocketbook kept me awake all night, for fear you might miss something when you opened it. Please count it over; I shan't be easy till you do."

The boy's face assumed a wonderfully earnest expression as he spoke, and the doctor looked at his fresh, yet strongly-marked young face most benevolently, as he replied :

"I think the judge would say you are right. No man should let money go out of his hand-without a receipt, he says."

"That's what I'm waiting for," said Bar.

"Ah, yes, I remember," said the doctor, as he drew the strap and began to turn over the contents of the wallet; "a receipt and something else."

Bar was silent, but Dr. Manning had now recovered his hitherto somewhat disturbed equilib-

rium, and he was now examining his recovered treasure as carefully as if he were noting the symptoms of a difficult "case," and that is saying a good deal.

"All there," he said, at last. "Every paper. Every cent. Not a thing missing."

"Please make me out a receipt in full, then," said Barnaby.

"Receipt!" exclaimed the doctor, as he took up a pen and a scrap of paper. "Certainly. One of those thousand dollar bills is yours, too. There it is. But I wish you would tell me now where you found it."

"No, thank you," said Bar. "I don't wish any reward. Find it? Oh, no, Doctor, I stole it for you."

"Stole it?"

Just then there came a violent ring at the door-bell, and Dr. Manning exclaimed:

"That's the judge, now. I'm ever so glad he's come."

In a moment more the keen, penetrating eyes of the old lawyer were busily reading, with practiced skill, every line and shade on the face of Barnaby Vernon.

"The money and papers are all right," remarked the doctor, "but our young friend refuses to take any reward or to tell me how he came by the wallet. He says he stole it."

"Stole it!" almost shouted the judge. "Stole it from the man who found it, I suppose?"

"That's it," said Bar. "One man found it in Dr. Manning's pocket. He gave it away to another man, at once, and he to another, and he to another way back in the crowd. I stole it from that man—or rather, for I was honest about it, I traded him another wallet for it."

"You're a deep one," exclaimed the judge. "I think I'd better have you arrested."

"Go ahead," said Bar, quietly.

"Arrest him!" exclaimed the doctor. "What for, I'd like to know?"

"For bringing back your pocketbook," said Bar.

"Well, well, young man," said the lawyer, half apologetically, "I don't mean that, exactly. But it's all very strange. Don't you think you deserve any reward?"

"Certainly," said Bar; "it's cost me a deal of trouble and worry, besides my carriage-hire this morning."

"Why won't you take it, then?" asked the puzzled doctor.

"I was going to ask something better than an arrest," said Bar.

"Come, come," said the judge, "I'll take that all back. I never was so interested in anything in all my life. What is it you want?"

"Nothing," said Bar, "except a little advice, and so I brought my fee with me."

"Advice!" exclaimed the doctor. "Why, you look about the stoutest, healthiest fellow of your age I've seen in a month."

"So I am," said Bar, "but I want advice, nevertheless. You see, I've heard that you doctors are the only men living that can keep a secret, and I can't get the advice I want without telling mine. So as soon as the judge is gone I'll tell it."

"That's a little the coolest!" growled the old lawyer. "Why, young man, doctors are no more professional secret-keepers than we are."

"But the doctor owes me a fee, a big one, and you don't," said Bar.

"Never mind," said the doctor, "we'll take the judge in as counsel. I'll pay his fee if he asks for one."

“The boy’s fee enough,” exclaimed the judge. “Never saw anything like him. Don’t let him send me away, Doctor. Look here, young man, it may be you want a lawyer more’n you do a doctor.”

“Very likely,” said Bar, “and I s’pose a fellow’s own counsel is bound to side with him? Have you time now, or shall I call again?”

“Call again?” shouted the judge. “Do you want me to burst? Out with it, now? How did you come by that wallet?”

Barnaby’s mind had been at work all night on what he meant to say that morning, and it never occurred to him as strange that those two elderly men should get so excited with curiosity as they now clearly were. He had struggled so long with the important question “what should he do with himself,” that he felt he must ask somebody, and surely two such men as these ought to be able to tell him. His next words were, therefore :

“Well, then, if you’ll keep my secret for me, I’ll begin at the beginning—it isn’t long.”

Not long. Only the outline story of such a life as he remembered, with Major Montague and

old Prosper, in every part of the country, and in all sorts of curious and often doubtful undertakings.

Then his own growing conviction that he had been born for something better, his final rebellion and his setting out for himself.

"But that black valise!" exclaimed the judge. "What did you find in that? You say you remember some sort of home and family when you were very young. Did you find anything about it?"

"I haven't opened it yet," said Bar. "You know, I said to you, I promised Major Montague I wouldn't open it for a year and a day. I must keep my word, even if he was ever so drunk when I gave it to him. If he'd been sober I'd never have known anything about it."

"Keep your word! What do you think of that, Doctor?"

"Think?" exclaimed the doctor, brushing his benevolent old eyes with his hand.

"You see, too," continued Bar, "it was that gang found your wallet in your pocket, and I stole it from Prosper in the crowd."

A few words more explained Bar's operations

more fully, but he absolutely refused to have anything to do with the "prosecution" the judge began to talk of.

"He's right," said the doctor. "He'd have to give testimony that would harm him wrongfully ——"

"I see," began the judge; "but ——"

Bar interrupted him with:

"And now, gentlemen, the whole of it is just this. I've got a new name, I want a new life, and you must advise me how to get into it. That'll be worth more to me than any one thousands dollars reward."

"But to think of such a boy seeing it in that light," exclaimed the judge.

"Judge," said the Doctor, "you seem to be all at sea. This looks like a case for me to treat. In a year from now he can open his valise, for I think he must keep his promise to his rascally uncle, and then we can't guess what he may learn. Meantime he must go to school."

"School!" exclaimed Bar. "How am I to manage that? My money's half-gone already. I must find a way of earning some more."

"I'll take care of that," began the judge, with sudden energy ; but the doctor interposed :

"It's all right, Judge. My boy goes back to Ogleport Academy in a couple of weeks or so, and our young friend must go with him. He must let me pay at least a year's schooling on account of the thousand dollars reward. He's saved me ten thousand, to say the least. A good deal more, I'm afraid. It'll be just the place for him, and his old scoundrel of an uncle will never think of hunting for him there."

"That's it," shouted the judge ; "only you must count me in, somewhere. My young friend, may be my turn'll come when that valise is opened. It may be chock full of law business, for all you know. Hullo, the boy's crying !"

It was a fact, though it did not long continue so. Poor Bar's anxieties and excitements, with the task of detailing his sufferings and adventures, crowned as all had been by such a wonderful result, had been too much for him. With all his hardly acquired keenness and self-possession, Bar Vernon was only a boy, after all, and he was altogether unused to such treatment as he was now receiving. Besides, the idea of

going to school, of all things, and in the country, and in decent company, such as he longed for—it was too much indeed, and Bar had covered his face with his hands.

“That’s all right,” said the doctor; “but now, Judge, I must see all this stuff safely deposited in bank, this time; I shan’t be easy till I’ve done that.”

“And I won’t leave you till you do,” said the Judge. “But how about Barnaby?”

“The carriage I came in is still at the door,” said Bar, looking up; “you might ride down in that and leave me at the hotel.”

“The very thing,” said the doctor. “And then I can call for you on my way back, and bring you right up here. No more hotel for you, my boy.”

Bar felt very much like going on with his cry, but the two old gentlemen were in a hurry, and in a few moments more the dignified porter almost broke his neck looking after the carriage as it carried off that trio. It was barely an hour later that the clerk of the hotel, after bowing most respectfully to the great physician, was electrified by his inquiring for Mr. Vernon.

"Didn't know he was sick."

"Sick? No, indeed," replied the doctor. "He's coming up to visit with my boy for awhile. Send up for him, please."

"Youngster's all right, after all," muttered the clerk to himself, "but that villainous looking Major Montague was here for him again this morning. Anyhow, he's in good hands now. Wonder who his father is?"

That was just the puzzle that was troubling the mind of our hero, and the doctor, and even the busy old judge himself, all the rest of that long, hot August day, and the little black valise never said or hinted a single word to relieve them.

CHAPTER VII

HUNTING THE COWS

A VERY pretty village was Ogleport, stuck away off there in that fertile valley among the hills. Mountains these latter grew into within a few miles, with ravines and rocky gorges instead of valleys, and beyond them was the great, mysterious, rugged wilderness, with its tall peaks and its forests full of wild animals.

Excellent people were those of Ogleport, with no small opinion of their village and themselves, and their "Academy" was their especial pride.

There it stood, in the middle of the great, tree-bordered "village green," while on either hand of it were the "meeting houses" of the half-dozen denominations among which the people of Ogleport and the surrounding country were divided.

A large, steeple-crowned structure of wood, painted white, with the staring windows of its

two lofty stories unshaded by any such nonsensical things as blinds, the Academy had evidently been planned by the same architect who had designed the church building, and it was as sober and ugly-looking as any of them.

Back of the row of meeting houses and the Academy were long, shadowy rows of ample sheds, for the accommodation of the teams and wagons of the country people on Sundays, and back of that again was the badly kept and tangled-looking "graveyard."

Those sheds were great places for the conclaves of the "boys" of Ogleport, but their larks rarely carried them, even in broad daylight, beyond or through or over the shattered picket fence of the graveyard.

Not that they were particularly superstitious, but then, as a general thing, they deemed it just as well to "go around," and it was, indeed, a queer place to get into alone after sundown.

If, however, the boys had any reverence for the bit of land where the village buried its dead, they had none whatever for the big, white building where they were themselves compelled to bury so much of the valuable time they might

otherwise have usefully employed in fishing, hunting, and other matters of equal importance.

The benches of the several rooms, not excepting those of the "chapel" or lecture-room in the rear, or the great hall in the second story, the frames of the doors, the pine wainscoting, the desks, every reachable piece of wood about the whole concern was notched and scarred by the sharp and busy knives of the boys of Ogleport.

More than one busy man, there and elsewhere, if he ever came back again on a visit, could trace his deeply-cut initials, three times painted over, among the innumerable scars of that institution of learning.

Zeb Fuller's generation had done at least their share of this particular kind of improvement, and the oldest inhabitants of the village freely declared their opinion that there had never been such a lot of unreclaimed young savages since the Indians cleared out.

Perhaps they were right, and then again perhaps they had forgotten something, but the boys did not trouble their minds much about it, either way.

Still, it was a great comfort to the Rev. Dr.

Solomon Dryer to meet with so liberal an amount of human sympathy, especially as it had helped him that summer to carry into effect his design of securing an additional assistant.

There had always been Mrs. Ross with two or three ambitious young ladies to help her in the male department, and a long and variegated line of "young men preparing for college," who had acted for the time being as "tutors" under Dr. Dryer, but never before had the Academy trustees ventured on the outlay required for a full-grown, thoroughly educated, competent man to do the doctor's heavy work for him.

Perhaps a certain feeling of jealousy on the doctor's part; a dread of having any second person so near his own throne of authority, had had something to do with it; but now there had appeared a new element of danger which he found himself compelled to meet.

Some mischievous friend and patron of the Academy, mindful, perhaps, of how much he had done towards whittling down the old building, had made it a present of a very complete set of chemical and other instructive apparatus, and what Dr. Dryer himself would do with such

new-fangled trash was a good deal more than he could tell.

And so—and so—there had been no end of solemn talk about it, but the new assistant had been hired, and was to begin his labors with the fall term, soon to begin.

An additional feather in the cap of Dr. Dryer had been the fact that an unusually large number of “boarders” was expected. That is, boys from a distance, who were to find homes among the villagers and drink in daily wisdom at the Academy.

Some were to come from even the great city, where the men all know so much and the boys were all so ignorant and so wicked, but wore such good clothes and paid their bills so promptly.

Zeb and his crowd were by no means unaware of all these things, and one of the curious results of the spring-board business was that it set Zeb to thinking.

“If he sets his face against me and won’t let me come in,” said Zeb, to himself, “I’ll miss all the new experiments. Besides, I really want to study some. There is a good deal in books. I

wonder if we couldn't coax the new man to put us into a course of Scott's Novels and history? Wonder if he'll be got up on the same plan as old Sol? Pity him if he is, that's all. Tell you what, I must manage to get straight with the doctor."

So saying, Zeb wandered off—for it was the very morning after the miller's dip in the pond—down to the mill-dam.

When he got there, he found Pat Murphy just finishing up a piece of work into which he had put all his heart for an hour.

"New spring-board, eh?" said Zeb. "Now go and get your saw."

"And what for should I do that same?" asked Pat.

"To set your drowning trap," replied Zeb, calmly. "I want to see how you do it. You cut it three-quarters through, don't you?"

"Now, Zeb, ye spalpeen, get out wid yer nonsense," growled Pat, with a very uneasy expression on his dusty face. "The boord's all right. Jist shtrip an' thry it wanst."

"No, thank you," said Zeb. "Did you really mean to murder old Gershom? And now you're

going to try it again. I'd never thought that of you, Pat."

"Go 'long wid yez!" laughed the Irishman. "Yer at the bottom of all the mischief there is. I hope there'll be young gintlemin from the city, the now, that'll tache ye manners. It's waitin' for thim, I am."

"Drown 'em, shall you?" said Zeb. "But what'll Gershom say to that? I'll have to be down here in my boat all the while."

"I owe ye one, Zeb Fuller!" exclaimed Pat, with a sudden and very warm burst of grateful recollection. "Ave yer iver in a schrape and want a frind, just come to owld Pat Murphy, that's all. It was mesilf didn't want to shpile the fun of yez. That's all."

"If we hadn't been on hand it would have been spoiled pretty badly," moralized Zeb. "I'm going for a pull in the boat now, myself. Give my love to Gershom when he comes, and tell him he's a nice boy."

A queer duck was Zeb Fuller, but, by the time he had floated vaguely up and down the pond two or three times, he had very fairly matured his plans for operating upon Dr. Dryer and pre-

venting the doors of the Academy from being closed against him.

That day was an unusually busy one for Ogleport, in vacation-time, for every gossip in the village had notes to compare with every other, but Zeb Fuller was among the invisible all day, and he retired to rest at an hour which gave his father renewed hopes of the bright future which lay before his heir.

No pains were taken, however, to ascertain whether Zeb's pillow was constantly occupied through the night-watches, and all the deacon was absolutely sure of was, that he had some difficulty in stirring him up in the morning.

"How's this, Zeb?" asked his father, as Zeb came sleepily poking down the stairs. "I'm sure you went to bed early enough."

"That's it," said Zeb. "The longer I sleep the better I seem to know how. If I keep on learning, I may be able to sleep a week, some of these long nights."

"Get away with the cows, then. You won't get any breakfast, now, till you come back. Hullo, there's Dr. Dryer at the gate. What's up now?"

Quite enough, one would think, and it was a very natural instinct which led the doctor to that particular house with his story.

Not a hoof had his red-headed errand-boy found in his lot back of his barn, that morning. Gate wide open. Cows gone, nobody knew whither.

"Something sure to happen in this place every time I oversleep myself," exclaimed Zeb. "Do you think they're stolen, Doctor, or did that little scamp of yours leave your gate open and let 'em run away?"

"Run away? Hope that's all," said the deacon.

"Have you looked for them?"

"Everywhere," replied the doctor, who had been narrowly eying Zebedee.

The latter did not flinch a hair's breadth, however, although he now seemed wide awake enough.

"Father," said he, suddenly, "I see what the doctor's after. I'll just put our cows in the pasture—not half an hour's work. Then you have the bay saddled, and I'll ride off after his critters. Get a lot of the boys to help me.

We'll find 'em for you, Doctor. You threatened to drown me, day before yesterday, and I'm glad to have a chance of returning good for evil."

He was off like a shot, and even his grim-visaged father more than half smiled, as he remarked: "Best you can do, Doctor. I'll have the bay colt ready for him when he gets back. Not another boy in the whole valley'd be so sure to make a find of it."

Dr. Dryer looked more solemn than ever, and shook his head ominously, for the thought which had brought him to Deacon Fuller's had hardly been permitted a fair expression.

Halfway down the path to the barn, Zeb was met by still another interested party, who rose lazily from the ground at his approach, cocked one dilapidated ear at him, and mutely inquired:

"Well, and what's to be done now?"

"All right, Bob," said Zeb, "but it's too soon to wag your tail yet. We must take all day to it. If we should find 'em right off, it'd look bad. We'll tend our own cows first."

Bob stopped the tail-wagging, though there could have been very little effort required to wag such a stump as that, and trotted off after his

master with a thoroughly canine faith that there was fun to come of some kind.

A large, mastiff-built brindled dog was Bob, for whom all the other village dogs had an unbounded respect, if not esteem. He was one of those dogs that no sane human being ever tries to steal.

Zeb's usual morning "chores" were finished up in rapid style, even for him, and by that time, too, he had succeeded in getting messages to half a dozen of his most trusted friends.

It looked very much, even to the watching eyes of Dr. Dryer, as if the "hunt" were to be made in earnest, and Effie stood behind him and Mrs. Dryer at the window, thinking what a grand time of it the boys would have, and half wishing she could join them.

"It's the least he can do," remarked Mrs. Dryer. "I do hope nothing has happened to that dun heifer. Those cows never ran away of their own accord."

If they had only been near enough to Deacon Fuller's front gate a few minutes later, they could have heard as well as seen.

"You see, boys," said Zeb, "you're all to hunt

for 'em, but I'm going on horseback, and of course I'll find 'em."

"We might, some of us."

"No, you mightn't," responded Zeb. "Bill Jones, you and Hy Allen scout out towards the lake. Take your hooks and lines in your pockets and be gone all day. If you catch any fish, you can give 'em away to somebody."

"Not if we don't get back till after dark," said Hy Allen.

"That's so," said Zeb. "Now, the rest of you might try the East hill. I'm going on the North road, over into Rodney."

"We might go for woodchucks," suggested one of the smaller boys.

"We might," said another, "but then the old sweet tree in Parker's orchard's about ripe."

"That's it," said Bill Jones, "and I saw him going through the village this very morning. Both his dogs with him."

"All right," replied Zeb. "Bob and I and the bay colt don't mean to come back till we bring Sol Dryer's cows along with us."

"Hurrah for Zeb Fuller!" shouted Hy Allen, and, with a yell of general approbation and

acquiescence in the plans of their chief, for such he seemed to be, that squad of "the worst boys in Ogleport," as Dr. Dryer would have called them, separated, each to his own especial usefulness.

In five minutes more, Zeb was in the saddle, and he and Bob were off to seek their fortune.

Just a little after noon of that eventful day it might fairly have been said that the plans of Zeb Fuller had fairly begun to ripen.

Bill Jones and Hy Allen were busily at work under a tree by the lake shore, building a fire to aid them in the preparation of their lunch. The borrowed boat they had pulled up on the beach had a very fine show of fish in it, but not a sign of a cow, and the pair of them seemed just as well contented.

Miles away, on the eastern hillside, another detachment of Zeb's faithful army were admiring the furry coats of no less than three woodchucks which they and their attendant curs had dug out and captured, while not a boy among them all could have got his hands into his pockets or put his hat on his head until he should have eaten

more half-ripe sweet apples than any one boy could have the slightest hope of holding.

Long miles away, again to the northward, the bay colt, without one flake of perspiration upon his glossy sides to indicate that he had been driven around the country very extensively, was pulled up in the middle of an open, unfenced bit of woodland, while his rider sat looking wistfully in all directions.

“Not a hoof or a horn!” exclaimed Zeb. “I’d no notion they’d wander out of this. Gone on North, anyhow. Come, Bob, we’ll come up with ’em before long.”

Not quite so soon as he thought, however, for one mile, two miles, and then a third, vanished under the now quickened pace of the bay colt, and the merry face of his rider was growing longer and longer, before a bark from Bob and a shout from his master greeted the discovery of cattle ahead.

And there they were, surely enough, the dun heifer and the two older cows, but not by any means feeding leisurely at the wayside, as they should have been.

On the contrary, they were being driven

steadily along northward, in the charge of three ragged, disreputable-looking, vagabond boys, two of them of about Zeb's size and one younger, and a big, mangy-looking yellow dog.

"Hullo!" shouted Zeb, as he galloped up and passed them, reining in the bay colt across the road. "What are you doing with them cows?"

"Drivin' 'em to the paound," exclaimed one of the larger boys, with a malicious grin. "That's wot we dew with stray critters over here in Rodney."

"Over here in Rodney!" exclaimed Zeb. "Why, those cows belong to Ogleport. Stolen last night out of the Rev. Dr. Solomon Dryer's own yard. I'll have you all arrested and sent to jail. Pound! I'll pound ye. Give 'em up, right off."

There was a little spasm of uncertainty on the faces of the vagabonds, but the "pound reward" for stray cattle in Rodney was a dollar a head, and they could not bear the thought of surrendering wealth like that to a boy of Zeb's size from a rival township.

They said as much in a moment more, and that

in such a dogged and threatening manner, and with such a profusion of unsavory epithets, that Zeb Fuller's valor got the better of his discretion.

He was no cavalryman.

All his fighting had hitherto been done on foot.

So he wisely cantered a few rods up the road, sprang from the saddle, hitched the bay, shouted to Bob, and started back for the duty that so plainly lay before him, cudgel in hand.

It was one against three, to be sure, for Bob recognized at once his mission to that yellow dog, but Zeb had special reasons of his own for not flinching.

Perhaps it was even less a sense of duty to the Rev. Dr. Solomon Dryer than of unexpressed remorse.

If those three vagabonds looked for an easy victory, however, they were sorely mistaken.

The dun heifer had been "hard to drive" all along, and she headed her mates in a vigorous break backward at the first rush of Zeb and his faithful ally.

It was all in vain that the smaller of the three

“impounders” rushed so wildly after them, and that lessened the odds against Zeb.

They were hard fighters, though, those two vagabonds of Rodney, and Deacon Fuller’s hopeful heir had all his work cut out for him.

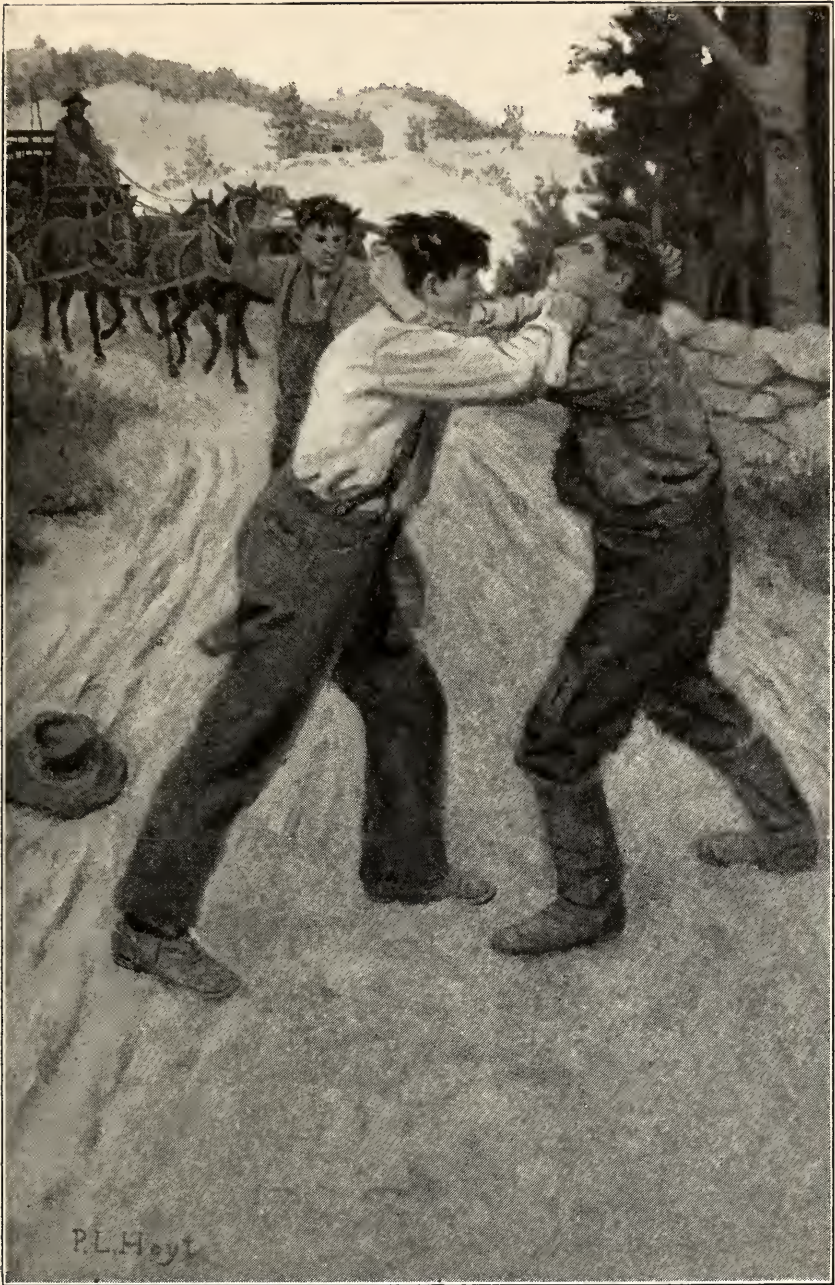
He was no scientific boxer, nor was either of his opponents, but Bob was more of an expert, and by the time Zeb began to really find himself in difficulty so did that unlucky yellow dog.

The worst of it was, however, that Bob deemed it his duty to make a clean finish of his particular job instead of coming to the help of his master.

Alas, for Zeb!

His cudgel was wrenched from his panting grasp, at last, though not till he had used it to excellent effect, and while he grappled with one of his foes the other was free to belabor him to his heart’s content. The result might have been bad for Dr. Dryer’s cows, but, just then, there came a sound of heavy wheels on the road above, and over the nearest “rise” of ground the daily stage-coach that plied up and down the valley came lumbering down to the field of battle.

So intent were the combatants, however, that the driver was compelled to pull in his horses to



ZEB'S FIGHT WITH THE RODNEY BOYS

keep from going over them in spite of his angrily shouted warnings.

For a wonder, the stage contained but three passengers, two old ladies and a fine-looking, tall, athletic young man.

The latter, however, had his head out of the window instantly, with :

“What’s the matter, driver ?”

“Boys fightin’ in the road, sir.”

“Fighting ? I declare !”

And the stranger was out on level ground immediately.

Even the vagabonds loosened their hold in consideration of the new arrival, and his sternly uttered reproofs and expostulations were replied to with a sullen :

“None of yer bisness. He’s a-takin’ away aour paound caows, an’ we’re a-lickin’ of him, that’s all.”

“Not much, they ain’t,” said Zeb, sturdily. “Bob, come here. There now, I’m ready again.”

“Ready for what, my young friend ?” asked the stranger, for he could not but see the difference between Zeb and the other two, for all his

bloody nose and disordered apparel. "You don't mean to fight any more?"

"Don't I?" exclaimed Zeb. "I mean to drive home Dr. Dryer's cows if I fight all day."

"Dr. Dryer's cows? Dr. Dryer, of the Ogleport Academy?" asked the stranger.

"Yes, Solomon," said Zeb. "That's the man. Those are his cows down the road there. Got away last night. I came after 'em and found these Rodney rascals driving 'em to the pound. Of course they can't have 'em."

"Of course not!" exclaimed the stranger. "You're perfectly right, my young friend. If that's your horse yonder, just mount him and we'll see if there'll be any more trouble."

The three vagabonds, for the smaller one had now come running up, took a good look at the stranger, another at the pugnacious attitude of Zeb, another at Bob, who was evidently getting dangerously impatient.

They looked with one accord at what was left of their big, yellow dog, now limping and yelping up the road, and then, with many a threat and whine and morsel of smothered abuse, they slowly sneaked away after their dog.

Zeb was on the bay colt's back quickly enough, and the dun heifer and her friends moved cheerfully on before him in the direction of Ogleport.

CHAPTER VIII

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING

IF Bar Vernon's companion in the carriage during his ride up-town that morning had been Judge Danvers, instead of Dr. Manning, he would doubtless have been subjected to a sort of conversational "cross-examination."

Indeed, he had half expected something of the sort, but the worthy doctor having fairly got rid of his pecuniary load and the troubles connected with it, had mentally gone back to his patients and was not a whit more talkative than his inborn politeness demanded of him.

Indeed, on arriving at the house, the doctor only waited to introduce Bar to Mrs. Manning, after a very brief talk with that lady in an inner room, and tell her to "send for Val," and then he was off to the reception of his long-delayed "callers" and the performance of his daily routine of healing duty.

Bar's previous experiences had led him into all

sorts of places, good and bad, but never before had he seen the interior of a home like that, so full of all the appliances which modern invention and the refinements of human art have provided for wealth and culture.

It was a sort of new world to him, and he found its unaccustomed atmosphere more than a little oppressive at first.

Even Mrs. Manning, with her gentle face, her beautiful gray hair and her kindly, easy, perfectly well-bred manners, seemed to him so like a being from another sphere, that her presence made him uneasy.

She understood him better than he imagined, however, and although she had plenty of questions in her mind, she considerably postponed them for a more convenient season.

"It's very wonderful," thought Bar. "To think of that pocketbook business bringing about all this! But I wonder who Val is?"

It was some little time before his curiosity was gratified, and then Mrs. Manning left him alone in the library, for a few minutes, to wonder at the multitude of elegant books, the folios of maps and engravings, and the rarely beautiful

pictures. When she returned she was accompanied by a young gentleman of about Bar's age, though scarcely so strongly built, whom she introduced as :

"My son Valentine, Mr. Vernon. I shall have to put you in his care for the rest of the day. I hope, and so does Dr. Manning, that you will be very good friends."

Valentine Manning was not only lighter built than Barnaby Vernon, he was a good deal lighter in the color of his hair, and the complexion of his face. His eyes were gray instead of the brownish-black of Bar's, and he was in every respect a good deal more of a "boy," at least to all outward appearances. He had never had the severe experiences which had so steadied and sobered his new acquaintance.

There was little danger that Bar would long feel as much shyness in his presence as in that of his mother, though he was a little awkward at first.

"Mother says you're to visit with me," said the doctor's son, after they found themselves alone, "and that then you're going out to Ogleport to school."

"Yes," said Bar, reservedly.

"Ever been at the Academy before?" asked his new friend. "I never heard of you. What's your first name?"

"Barnaby. Bar Vernon."

"Bar? That's a good handle. Mine's Val. You can't expect a fellow to be saying mister all the time. Did you say you'd been to Ogleport?"

"No," said Bar, with an effort. "I was never at school in all my life."

"Whew!" whistled Val. "What an ignoramus you must be! Did you ever study algebra?"

"Never."

"Nor geometry?"

"I saw the word in a newspaper, once," said Bar, "but I don't know what it means."

"Then won't you have a high old time with Dr. Dryer, that's all," exclaimed Val. "Can't you read?"

"Oh, yes," said Bar, eager to come up in something; "I can read and write, and all that. Let me show you."

Bar took up a pen, but, before he had written a half dozen lines, Val stopped him with:

"There, now, that'll do. You can beat me all hollow with a pen. Pity you don't know French, or something."

"Oh," exclaimed Bar, "I can talk French, and German, too, and a little Spanish. It's easy enough to pick up such things. What I don't know is what you learn at school."

"Well," replied Val, "I wish I could pick up as much as that. Anyhow, I s'pose there's lots of things I can teach you. Did you ever go fishing?"

"Never had a chance."

"Nor hunting, nor skating?"

"Never," said Bar, "but I can shoot. I had to learn that."

"I'd like to know where you've lived all your life," remarked Val.

"Maybe I'll tell you some day," said Bar, seriously, "but I'd rather not just now."

Val Manning was a gentleman, boy as he was; and he colored to his ears as he replied:

"There, now, beg your pardon. Mother told me I mustn't ask you any questions. Come on into the billiard-room and I'll teach you how to play. Father never wants me to go to a public

billiard-hall, you know, so he has a tip-top table here at home. Plays himself sometimes, when the sick people give him a chance. Come on."

Bar followed his young host into the neat and cozy apartment in the third story to which he led the way, and he felt a species of awe come over him as he passed one evidence after another of what plenty of money can do for the home of such a man as Dr. Manning.

Val picked up a cue and Bar listened in silence to the very clear and practical sort of lecture that followed on the rudiments of the game.

"Suppose we play one now," said Bar, "and you can tell me more as we go along."

Val assented, with hearty good-will, and he really showed a good deal of dexterity, for a boy of his age, in the noble art of knocking the ivory balls about.

He made a very good "run" before he missed, and then drew back with:

"There, Barnaby, the balls are in an awful bad position. I couldn't make that carrom myself. Not many men could, but you'll never learn if you don't try. This is the shot. See?"

Bar had been leisurely chalking his cue. Some things Val had said had unintentionally nettled him, and he had hardly been as frank as he should have been.

Now, however, he stepped quietly forward, made the impossible shot with an ease and quickness which altogether electrified Val, and followed it up with a dozen others of almost equal difficulty, ending by running the two red balls into a corner and scoring a clean fifty before he made a miss-cue and lost control of them.

Val had stood watching him in silence to the end, but when Bar turned to him with :

“Your turn again now !” he exclaimed.

“My turn ? I should say so. Well, I’ll play the game out, but billiards isn’t one of the things that I have to teach you. You can give me lessons all the while.”

So it looked, indeed, but poor Bar had paid dearly enough for that useless bit of an accomplishment, and he would gladly have traded it with Val for a few of the things the latter probably valued very lightly.

After the billiards, Val suggested a visit to the gymnasium, not a great many blocks away, but

there he was even more astonished than he had been in the billiard-room.

"If you only knew a little algebra and geometry!" he exclaimed, enthusiastically, "you'd be a treasure to the Academy. Won't we have fun!"

"How's that?" asked Bar.

"Why, of course you don't know," said Val. "Wait till we get there, though. I just want some of those country fellows to try on their games again. I was almost alone last term, and they were too much for me. Got awfully thrashed twice, and I'm just dying to try 'em on again. Been training for it all vacation. But you're worth three of me."

"I'll back you," shouted Bar. "But then," he added, "I thought we were going to the Academy to study?"

"So we are," said Val, "and I wouldn't disappoint my mother for anything, nor my father, either, but you can't study all the while, and there's any quantity of fun in the country."

They were coming down the stairs from the gymnasium into the street, while they were talking, and just then, as they reached the sidewalk, Bar grasped his friend's arm with:

“Val—Val—let’s hurry. There’s a man I don’t want to have see me.”

Val moved quickly enough, but he should not have looked at the same time, for he thereby attracted the attention of a large, showily-dressed man, seemingly some sort of a gentleman whose eyes they might otherwise have avoided.

“Aha! my young fellow! Have I found you? What have you done with my valise? Come right along with me, now. I’ve been hunting you for a week. Come along, Mr. Jack Chills.”

Bar’s cheeks had turned a trifle pale at first, but they were blazing red now. It seemed to him as if all his “new time” were suddenly in peril, and he determined not to lose it without an effort.

“You are mistaken in the man,” he firmly replied. “My name is not Chills, but Vernon—Barnaby Vernon. If you annoy me I shall call the police at once. Take away your hand, sir.”

“Police, indeed? Do you mean to say I’m not your guardian, Major Montague? And do you mean to say you’re not my nephew, and that you did not run away with my valise and all my

valuable papers? Come right along. I shan't give you up, now I've got you."

"Police!" shouted Bar, stoutly, and:

"Police! police!" echoed Val, with a boyish resolve to stand by his friend.

It was not a quarter of the city in which the police are most plentiful, or it may be Major Montague would have hesitated, anxious as he was, for reasons of his own, to amend the errors of his fit of maudlin penitence, but, just for that once, the shout of the two boys fell on the right pair of ears, and the Major was actually brought face to face with a "very intelligent-looking cop," as Val afterwards described him.

"Who are you?" was his first and somewhat rough question, addressed to the two boys.

"Who am I?" exclaimed Val, proudly. "I'm Valentine Manning, son of Dr. Randall Manning, and this is Mr. Barnaby Vernon, who is visiting with me."

"And this," added Bar, pointing at Major Montague, "is a very well-known bad character. I believe he is a professional pickpocket; but I

couldn't make a charge against him, except for assault on me now."

"I don't know if I'd better take you in charge," began the policeman; but just then the proprietor of the gymnasium came down the stairs.

"Anything the matter, Mr. Manning?" he said to Val. "I thought you and your friend were up in the room. Policeman, what is that fellow up to?"

"Some game or other, I don't quite understand what. My man," he added to the Major, "you've missed it this time. I'll remember you, though. Move on, now, and don't let me see you loafing on my beat. Move!"

Major Montague's face was purple with wrath, but he saw very clearly that it was not his day. How on earth Bar should so soon have found friends, and strange ones, and become a recognized member of "society," instead of a homeless and wandering vagabond, was a puzzle that surpassed his utmost guessing.

There was no doubt about it, however, for there stood the gymnasium proprietor, one of the best known men in the city, and there was the policeman.

Dreadfully positive and practical looked the latter, to be sure ; and the Major had no choice but to give the matter up for a bad job and " move on."

He determined, however, to get at the bottom of the mystery some day, cost what it might.

Bar thanked the policeman very pleasantly, as he and Val turned away, but he felt as if there would be a load of fear on his heart until he could get off somewhere, away beyond the danger of any more such meetings.

Not but that he felt sure of protection from any real harm, but he wanted his deliverance from his " old time " to be absolute and complete, and it could hardly be so with Major Montague in the immediate neighborhood.

" I don't want to ask any questions, Bar," said Val, " but does my father know anything about that fellow ? "

" You've a right to ask that," said Bar. " Yes, he does, and so does Judge Danvers. I meant every word I said to him or about him. He's a miserable fellow, and I don't mean he shall bother me at all. Let's go somewhere and get a lunch. I'll stand treat."

"No, you can't," exclaimed Val. "You're my guest, you know. Come on. I know where we can get a tip-top one."

Of course he did, for he took Bar at once to a fashionable up-town restaurant of the very first class.

The way to it was in the opposite direction from the one Major Montague had taken, and Bar experienced a feeling of relief at finding himself at one of the little marble-topped tables, with so many well-appearing ladies and gentlemen around him. A moment later, however, Val asked him :

"What's the matter, Bar, my boy? You look pale."

"Nothing," replied Bar; "only do you see that tall, French-looking party, three tables away down the aisle, there on the right?"

"I see him," said Val. "You can never tell anything by the looks of those foreigners. I took one for a gambler a while ago, and he turned out to be a Count somebody. Maybe that's a Count. Do you know him?"

"Wait and see if he stays to finish his dinner," said Bar. "I don't want him to speak to me."

The stranger, if his exterior had been reërranged to suit, might have resembled a gentleman by the name of Prosper, but, just then and there, he was managing a very different character, for his former plans, as we have seen, had been badly broken up, and he was for the present, not only alone in the world, but anxious to remain so.

His position was "sidewise" to that of the two friends, and there was no one between them.

Suddenly it seemed to him as if a voice close to his ear exclaimed :

"Russia leather, eh ?"

He cast a quick and startled glance around him, but failed to discover the source of the remark.

"It's a bad fit," said the voice again, but this time the stranger merely shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothing else in it," was the next remark of his mysterious neighbor. A moment more and he heard :

"Then he made nothing by it ?"

"No, the doctor got it back."

"Do such fellows come here ?"

One after another the words, in varying tones and seemingly close beside him, added their harrowing suggestions, and the cold sweat was beginning to stand out on the forehead of the unfortunate "foreigner."

He would not have looked around him for the world, but he stealthily reached out to the hat-rack for his hat and cane, and was swiftly gliding out of the front door, when a watchful waiter intercepted him with the polite suggestion that he had better pay for his dinner first.

He was glad enough to do that, nor did he once look back from the "pay-desk." It was not likely he would soon again venture into that precise restaurant.

"Bar, my boy," said Val, "who was it talking with that chap?"

"Anything more, sir?" suddenly inquired the voice of the waiter, who had attended them, just behind Val's chair. "You mustn't make a pig of yourself."

Val wheeled angrily, to find that not a soul was standing near him.

"Bar!" he exclaimed, turning back, "did you hear that? Did he mean me?"

"Oh, hush, and take a pill."

It was the waiter's voice again, closer than before, and Val sprang to his feet indignantly.

"Don't step on me! Here I am, down here. Take your foot off. Oh, what a mouth!"

Val had lifted his feet quickly enough, but involuntarily, but now he gazed earnestly in the motionless face of his new friend.

"Bar Vernon, are you a ventriloquist!"

"Of course he is," exclaimed the voice on the floor. "Don't you see how long his ears are? Take your foot off. There, now I can die in peace. Good-bye!"

A long, choking sort of gurgle followed, but Val's face was all one radiance of triumphant fun.

"Bar, is that so? Hurrah for that! Won't we have larks up in Ogleport, and everywhere else? Let's go home now. You're just the sort of chum I'd have asked for. Why, we'll have some fun at the house this very evening. Come on."

CHAPTER IX

ZEB'S FAME PRECEDES HIM

THE stage-driver was getting somewhat impatient, although the delay had not been a long one, but the stranger turned for one more word with Zeb Fuller before he climbed back to his seat in front of the two old ladies.

"Are you a son of Dr. Dryer?"

"Son?" exclaimed Zeb, as he held in the bay colt. "Oh, no. Solomon's a good boy, and I've done what I could to bring him up right, but he's no son of mine."

"Bring him up!" exclaimed the stranger.

"Yes," said Zeb, "I've had him under my care for several years now, at the Academy, but there's some things he won't learn. The boys get away from him, and so do the cows. I wish I had some one to help me with him."

A ringing laugh responded to Zeb's last remark, and:

"Well, I'll try, then. I'm Mr. George Bray-

ton, and I'm on my way to join Dr. Dryer. I'll tell him how hard a fight you had for his cows."

Zeb's face lengthened a little, but he answered, quickly:

"And don't forget Bob. Solomon doesn't understand dogs much better than he does boys."

"Likely as not," exclaimed Brayton to himself, as he sprang into the stage. "Go on, driver. Now, there's a boy worth somebody's while to understand. Hullo! you didn't tell me your name, after all."

And, as the stage rolled on, Brayton heard something that sounded very much like:

"Rev. Zebedee Fuller, D.D., LL. D., etc.." for Zeb remained behind at his duty.

The latter had no more difficulty in it. The cows had been milked, all three of them, and Zeb was glad of it, but they were in a worried and disconsolate frame of mind, and glad enough to find their peaceful heads turned homeward.

Bob had suffered very little in his combat with the yellow dog, and was now evidently conscious that he and his master had gained a very substantial kind of victory. You could see the sense of triumph expressing itself in the rigid

erectness of his remaining ear, and in the unyielding pride of his stump of a tail. A very intelligent sort of dog was Bob.

As for Zeb, that young gentleman had hardly come off so well as his canine ally, for the vagabonds had been hard hitters, and every bone of his body bore witness to that fact.

His face, too, was even less of a beauty than usual, and the cast in his left eye was by no means robbed of its effect by the deep tinge of blue which was beginning to show under the right.

Zeb had chaffed bravely enough with Mr. Brayton, but his mind was by no means easy, after all.

“Put my foot in it, as usual,” he said aloud to himself; “but how was I to guess that he was old Sol’s new man? Seems a good one, too. Not exactly the sort they generally make teachers of. Most generally they make ’em out of the chips after they’ve used up all the good timber on men. Now, he looks like a man. Well, if he is, he won’t tell on me in any bad way. Why, there was a speck of fight in his eyes, too, and I know he’d ha’ liked to see Bob walk into that

yellow dog. Reckon that might have done even old Sol some good."

Zeb was in no way impatient to reach the end of his journey. In fact, the nearer he came to Ogleport the better contented he seemed to be that the cattle should take his own gait.

Still, those few miles could not last forever, and before sunset Zeb found himself in such a position as he had never occupied before. He was still on the back of the bay colt, and Dr. Dryer's cows were plodding along before him down the main street of the village, but it seemed as if he had never before realized how many boys Ogleport contained.

They were all there, and determined to emphasize their appreciation of their hero by a species of triumphal procession.

The news of Zeb's exploit had preceded him, growing as it traveled, and the smaller the size of the Ogleport boy might be, the more vividly his imagination had supplied him with crowds of the ferocious vagabonds of Rodney, on horseback and on foot, and miscellaneously armed and arrayed, with Zebedee Fuller careering among them on his father's bay colt, and valorously

rescuing from their rapacious grasp the erring kine of the Rev. Dr. Dryer.

It had seemed at first like an impossible romance, a vision of the Middle Ages, or a leaf torn from a dime novel, but behold the reality was here, and no boy could disbelieve his own eyes.

There were the cows, safe and sound. There was the bay colt, and on his back rode home in glory the hero of the hand-to-hand conflict, his face yet liberally smeared with unwiped gore from his nose, now badly puffed, while every square inch of his summer clothing bore tokens that he had measured his length in the dust and mud of Rodney.

It was a grand thing for the boys of Ogleport. Every soul of them rose from one to five pegs in his own estimation, and took on more exalted views of the course in life which he must necessarily pursue that he might equal, some coming day, the laurels of the victorious Zeb.

Not the least appreciative of all these worshippers was the level-headed youth who delivered to Bob a bone of unusual size and meatiness.

That was the way Zeb came to miss his faith-

ful follower, for Bob was a conscientious dog, and that bone had to be entombed at once in the deacon's backyard.

Zeb's spirits were rising rapidly, but, just before he reached the wide open gate of Dr. Dryer's cow-lot, the voice of his father smote upon his ear with:

"Zebedee, my son, have you been fighting?"

"Not exactly, father," replied Zeb; "the other fellows did the fighting. Bob and I went for the cows."

"What will your mother say?" exclaimed the deacon, for it really required an unusual amount of hypocrisy to be hard on Zeb just then, and the deacon was no hypocrite.

"Say! Why, father, you don't suppose she'll take the side of those Rodney boys, do you?"

Whatever answer the deacon might have made was interrupted by the appearance of the Rev. Dr. Dryer, attended by the females of his family and by Mr. George Brayton himself.

"That's the boy, Doctor," said the latter. "You'd have had to get your cows out of the Rodney pound if it hadn't been for him."

"I only wish some person would afford me

trustworthy information as to the manner of their escape from my own inclosure," replied the doctor, solemnly.

"Are you sure you fastened the gate last night?" asked Zeb.

"I am positive that all things were in order when I retired," was the response.

"Then there's only one way they could have got out," said Zeb.

"What's that?" asked the deacon.

"Flying," said Zeb; "and, not being used to it they flew further than they meant to."

Effie Dryer came to the relief of her puzzled elders with a burst of girlish merriment, in which George Brayton, though more reservedly, was willing enough to join her; but her father's countenance was full of stern reproof of both her and Zeb.

"You are too much disposed to trifle, my young friend," he said to the latter. "You have done me a very excellent service, for which I thank both you and your worthy father. I regret exceedingly the apparent necessity of a resort to violence. You have evidently suffered severe contusions."

"But, Doctor!" exclaimed Zeb, "you ought to have seen those two Rodney chaps. My face isn't a sign to their'n. And then their dog! Bob had him down for close on to five minutes. You'd have enjoyed it as well as I did if you'd only been there. Ask Mr. Brayton. He missed the best of it, though."

"I must say," said the gentleman appealed to, "that Zeb had evidently done his whole duty by his opponents, and his dog had left nothing to ask for on his part. Zeb, hadn't you better go home and wash your face?"

"Yes, Zeb," exclaimed his father, "and tell your mother about it and take care of the bay colt."

Zeb was glad enough to get away, for he was becoming conscious that Effie Dryer's merry eyes had discovered something absurd and laughable in his appearance, and he was by no means "hardened" enough to stand that.

He was quite well satisfied, moreover, to avoid any further discussion of the manner in which the cows had "escaped" the night before, for a more utterly wingless set of quadrupeds were never accused of flying.

As for his mother, good soul, Zeb had small

fears of any trouble there, as soon as she should be sure that he had suffered no real injury.

Good Mrs. Fuller, the meekest soul in Ogleport, had come of sound "revolutionary" stock, and the deacon himself would have been more surprised than Zeb was at the real character of the "scolding" she gave him.

"You couldn't help it, Zeb?"

"Not without giving up the cows."

"Sure there was no other way but to fight those boys? I wouldn't have had to."

"You'd have had to let 'em drive the cows to the pound, then."

"You thought you were doing your duty, then, Zeb?"

"Yes, mother," said Zeb, firmly. "It was my fault that the cows got away, and so it was my duty to bring 'em back again."

"Oh, Zeb! More of your mischief? I'm sorry for that, and I'm sorry you had to fight."

"Mother!"

"But, Zeb, my boy, I'm not at all sorry you tried to do your duty, and that you didn't flinch."

Zeb half believed his mother to be an angel at

any time, but she had never before seemed nearer one than just then.

It was pretty certain her words would return to him some other time, when a question should arise between duty and "flinching."

Just then, however, after a good bit of work at the wash-basin, Zeb went out to look after the wants of the bay colt, with a glow at his heart and a sort of feeling that he wouldn't mind having his other eye blackened.

"I'm getting awful stiff, though," he said to himself, "and I don't believe I could make much of a wrestle till I get the marks of that club off my arms and legs."

On his way to the pasture afterwards, Zeb learned from Bill Jones and Hy Allen the results of their day's fishing, and the other boys assured him they had kept for him a liberal share of the spoils of the old "sweet tree."

At Dr. Dryer's house, that evening was an unusually lively one, for the doctor and his wife, and even Effie herself, were "on their good behavior" in one sense over the newcomer.

CHAPTER X

THE PUZZLED PROFESSOR

ON the return of the boys to the house of Dr. Manning, Val's hospitable young mind had been somewhat disturbed as to how he should amuse his new friend during the remaining hours of the afternoon.

"To-morrow," he said, "I'll get father to lend us the carriage, and we'll have a grand drive, and next day we'll do something else. Maybe we'll go fishing. There's plenty of fun evenings, but what'll we do now?"

"One thing I'd like to do," said Bar.

"What's that?"

"Why, I never saw so many books and things in all my life as there are in your library. Do you suppose your father'd object to my taking a closer look at them?"

"The library?" exclaimed Val. "Why, that isn't much. Father'd be glad enough if I'd put in more time there than I do. Then he's got a

whole lot of things in his laboratory. Fun there, now !”

“I should say so,” said Bar. “I know something about that. We had to work up a whole lot of experiments once.”

“We ?” said Val, inquiringly.

“Yes,” said Bar. “I and some other fellows. Only we just learned enough to play our tricks, that’s all.”

“That’s more’n I know, except to spoil my clothes with acids and things,” said Val. “Anyhow, if you can amuse yourself in the library I’m glad of it. Go ahead.”

It seemed to Bar Vernon that afternoon, as he wandered vaguely from one treasure of printing to another, as if he were soaking in learning from those elegantly bound volumes. The very leather on their backs had something wise and instructive in the smell of it.

So it seemed, indeed ; nor was Bar’s notion so far wrong as it might be thought. A man is always a good deal influenced by his companions, especially if he takes a personal interest in them.

The companionship of books is only less

powerful than that of human beings, just as their "study" is. As for the reverse of the proposition, if anybody doubts that human beings—boys, especially—"make an impression" on books, just let him lend them his own favorite volumes, and he will be speedily convinced.

Dr. Manning was by no means displeased that evening when he heard from Val a faithful account of the day's doings.

Val had nothing to conceal, and he would never have dreamed of doing so, if he had, for he was his father's own son in straightforward simplicity.

The dinner-hour was six o'clock, and after that there were visitors, and the doctor's back-parlor, opening into the library, looked remarkably cheerful.

It was a warm evening, and the whole suite of rooms was thrown into one by opening the folding-doors, but the front part was only half-lighted.

Bar felt more than a little shy at first, but a strong feeling of gratitude was rapidly growing upon him.

What would he not do to keep such friends as these ?

Very kind they were, too ; and so were their visitors, all except the big, burly, pretentious-seeming personage, who was planting himself on the piano-stool in such a lordly way, just as Val whispered to his father :

“ Mayn’t Bar play a trick on Professor Sturm ? ”

“ Trick ? No, my son, nothing rude. How could you ask ? ”

“ Not rude, father, only funny. Bar’s a ventriloquist. ”

“ Oh ! ” said the doctor, “ I see ; Bar, you must be careful. ”

Now it happened that “ Professor Sturm ” had already stirred up Bar’s sense of “ personal resistance,” by his previous superciliousness to both him and Val, and he was quite ready to act upon the doctor’s halfway consent.

The professor had evidently proposed to himself that he would electrify the little company by what he would do with that piano, and he now made a dignified and self-confident dash at the keyboard, after the usual manner of experts.

This would have been succeeded promptly by another artistic effort if it had not been followed instantly by a smothered and mournful howl from the depths of the piano.

The professor's hands, on which more than one huge ring was glittering, came down with a convulsive start, and the discord produced was acknowledged by a repeated and more bitter cry of pain.

"Vas is dese tings?" exclaimed the man of music, springing to his feet. "Dere is somepody in de biano!"

"Of course there is," replied a voice from the heart of the mysterious instrument, while the amazed doctor and his guests came crowding up with one accord.

"Doctor," asked Professor Sturm, "dit you hear dat biano? I shall blay him some more. You see."

The professor was a man of pluck, but no sooner did his fingers again begin to wander over the chords than a tumult began behind the rosewood in front of him.

Now it was one cat, then three or four. Then a distressed dog. And then a human voice appealed to the professor.

"Please, don't. You hurt us dreadfully."

"De defil's in de biano!" exclaimed the professor.

"No," replied the voice, "not the devil. Only a lot of notes broke loose. If you'd only tie us up again."

"Die 'em up!" said the professor. "Doctor, dit you hear 'em?"

"Yes, I heard them," said the doctor. "Did you have any loose notes with you when you came?"

"Loose note, Doctor! Vat is de loose note?" cried Professor Sturm, with a fast-reddening face.

"In your pocket. Here we are," replied a curious little voice from the professor's own loose sack-coat. "We love you very much."

"You lofe me! Who are you?"

"Oh! let us out, please. It's dark in here. No air. If you don't, I'll tell them all what I've found."

The poor professor was evidently becoming sadly perplexed when kind-hearted Mrs. Manning decided that the boys had pushed their fun quite far enough.

“Not any more, Barnaby,” she said, pleasantly. “Professor, you mustn’t be angry with the boys. But don’t you think he’s a very good ventriloquist for one so young?”

“Oh! dat’s it,” exclaimed the professor, glad enough of an escape from his difficulties. “Den I serve him right if I make him sit down at de biano. Maybe he make some cat and dog music, eh?”

The burly professor suited the action to the word, and almost before Bar knew it, he found himself seated at the piano. He would never have ventured there of his own accord, but it occurred to him that the very least he could do was to amuse his new friends by any little accomplishments he might happen to possess, and the piano, therefore, immediately asked him:

“What are you there for?”

Many a stray hour of Barnaby’s “old time” had been spent in pounding away at one rickety piano or other, and he really had some natural genius for music, so that his reply in the shape of “amateur performance” was by no means discreditable to him.

Mrs. Manning was looking at her husband in

a good deal of amazement, when the music was interrupted again by what Val called "trouble in the piano."

This time the instrument complained that that kind of playing made him very sick, and begged Bar to "fetch on his orchestra."

In response to this, there followed a very fair medley of imitations of half a dozen different instruments, winding up with a duet between a cat and an accordion, gleefully accompanied by the piano.

"There," said the latter, "now, if you only get away, I'd like to have the professor for a while. Don't you wish you could play as well as he can?"

"Indeed I do," remarked Bar, politely, as he rose from the piano-stool. "I suppose, Professor, I ought to beg your pardon."

"Oh! no—no, my young frent," exclaimed the enthusiastic German. "You haf de great genius. Nefer in all de vorlt was dere a biano filled with cats and togs before. I shall ask you to come mit me some tay. It is all fery goot fun."

So the lady guests declared, but Mrs. Manning

determined to have another serious talk with her husband about the very remarkable companion he had selected for Valentine's next year at school.

A little later and Judge Danvers himself was announced.

The doctor and the lawyer had a long conference of their own in the study, and then Barnaby was sent for.

The judge had a number of questions to ask, especially concerning Bar's meeting that day with Major Montague, and at the end of it, as if entirely satisfied with the young adventurer's account of himself, he remarked to Dr. Manning:

"You are right, Doctor. He and Val had better be off as soon as possible. Send them down to the seashore for a few days, and then let them start for Ogleport. It won't hurt them to get there a little before school begins. Have you secured a boarding-place?"

"Oh, yes," said the doctor. "Old Mrs. Wood will be glad enough of another boarder in her big old barn of a house. I only wish she could cram it full, if they were all of the right sort."

"Yes," replied the judge; "but, from what

you have told me of Barnaby's performance this evening, I fear there are curious times in store for Mrs. Wood, if not for all Ogleport."

"Indeed, sir!" exclaimed Bar, "I pledge you my word ——"

"There, now," interrupted the judge; "don't say that. I'm a dried-up old lawyer myself, but I am not so cruel or so foolish as to expect all the boys to be sixty years old. You won't do anything bad or mean, I feel sure of that, and you mustn't lead Val into scrapes; but if you did promise not to have any fun you couldn't keep it. I don't want you to try."

And so Bar's two "guardians" decided, much to his delight, that he was to be delivered from any further risks of meeting his "uncle" or old Prosper.

CHAPTER XI

WILLING HANDS

AN unusually fine-looking man was George Brayton, only his full beard and mustache, and his length and strength of limb, made him seem at least three years older than he really was.

Perhaps Effie Dryer would have been less afraid of him if she had known that he was but twenty-three, hardly more than four years older than herself.

It was not so easy as the reverend doctor could have wished, however, for him to look dignifiedly down upon a man who overtopped him by a head and outweighed him by at least fifty pounds of clear bone and muscle.

An evil-disposed person might have added:

“And who had forgotten more before he left college than the Academy principal had ever known in all his born days.”

That was a thing, however, which Dr. Dryer could hardly have imagined of any human being,

even while he half-scornfully admitted his new assistant's greater familiarity with the chemical apparatus and "all that new-fangled trash."

Brayton had given a decidedly vivid account of Zeb's valorous behavior on the road, but he had failed to repeat that young worthy's exact statement of the relations between himself and "old Sol."

Effie knew very well that he was keeping back something, but he was altogether too new an acquaintance to ask any questions of, and she was compelled to smother her curiosity in a general "wonder" what it could be that made Mr. Brayton's face look so very much as if he were trying not to laugh.

As for Mrs. Dryer, that lady smiled all the evening on the handsome newcomer, and every time she smiled it seemed to cost her more of an effort. In fact, before the evening was over, George Brayton had one thoroughly rooted enemy in Ogleport, and, when the doctor and his wife found themselves once more alone, the first thing that smote upon his ears was:

"Board with us? That fellow, with all his airs and graces? He board in our house? No,

indeed! Let him go to old Mrs. Wood's, or to anybody that'll take him. My advice to you is that you get rid of that kind of an assistant as soon as ever you can."

"Why, Dorothy Jane, my dear ——"

"Don't talk to me, Mr. Dryer. Haven't I your true interests at heart? Don't you s'pose I can see what's coming? It'll be just like a young minister in a church. Everybody 'll go mad about him. All the girls 'll be setting their caps for him. All the old women 'll be inviting him to tea, so's to give their daughters a chance. The young men 'll hate him, that's a comfort. Such a fellow won't have any control over the boys, neither. Why, he actually laughed twenty times this very evening."

A very hearty and wholesome laugh, indeed, had been that of George Brayton—not at all the sort to bring upon him the enmity of the young men, but they were a part of the community which Mrs. Dr. Dryer had never very thoroughly understood, and it might be she was as much mistaken about them now as she had been in her younger days, if that sort of woman ever really has any.

The next morning dawned peacefully enough upon the sleepy-looking homes of Ogleport, but there was a general sense of insecurity pervading the entire community. Perhaps, if anybody had succeeded in expressing the common feeling, it would have been a "Wonder where Zeb Fuller won't turn up next?"

Old Mr. Parker came down from the East hill in the middle of the forenoon, full of a wrathfully determined investigation of the raid on his orchard during the day before.

He listened with half incredulous amazement to the account the miller gave him of Zeb's rescue of Dr. Dryer's cows, and thus responded :

"Brother Todderley, if that's true I begin to have my doubts. I don't see how any apple tree in these parts could well be robbed if Zeb Fuller wasn't there. It doesn't seem to stand to reason, somehow."

"Squire Parker," replied the miller, "there's worse boys in these parts than Deacon Fuller's son. He saved my life the other day, and I believe he's got the making of a great man in him."

"There he is, now !" exclaimed Parker, point-

ing to a group of boys gathered at the mill-dam. "I'd like to know what mischief's on foot this time."

"You won't learn by asking," said the miller, but his friend exclaimed :

"Anyhow, I'm going to take a look at that crowd of boys."

As they approached, Zeb arose from the log on which he had been sitting and greeted them ceremoniously.

"Good-morning, Mr. Todderley. Glad to see you, Mr. Parker ; I was thinking of coming to see you."

"To see me ?"

"Yes," said Zeb ; "I was going to ask if you had any sweet apples to sell."

"You young rascal, what do you know about my apples ?"

"Your apples ?" cried Zeb, with a surprised air. "Why, has anything happened to them ? That was one thing I meant to speak about if I came to see you. I noticed the other day that you are careless about them. I'm afraid you've left 'em out over night, hanging on the trees. Have any of 'em run away ?"

“Run away!”

“That’s it. I was afraid it would be so,” moralized Zeb. “Just like old Sol Dryer’s cows. There’s nothing sure in this world, Mr. Parker. Nothing but death and taxes.”

“Brother Todderley!” exclaimed the angry old farmer, “I believe he knows all about it. I’ll go right and see his father, at once. I don’t believe a word of that cow business—not a word of it.”

“Look at his eye, Brother Parker,” argued the miller, as he hurried to keep pace with his longer-legged friend. “Look at his eye. Didn’t get that fighting with your apples. No use, Parker. Look at his eye.”

“Eye! Eye!” exclaimed Parker. “What do I care about his eye? What I want to know is, what went with my apples?”

That was a question the fat miller could not undertake to answer, and he had hardly breath left for any other by the time they reached the mill.

Before noon half of Ogleport was disputing with the other half whether Zeb Fuller could have been in old Parker’s orchard and up in

Rodney at the same time, for there was more than a little common sympathy with the idea that no out-and-out mischief was probable in Zeb's absence.

He had indeed been present in the flesh at but one point at a time, but the general impression was hardly so far wrong as it might have been.

"Boys," Zeb had remarked to his faithful followers, "we did splendidly yesterday, all of us, but there's troublesome times ahead. I understand that that city fellow's coming back to the Academy next term, and there'll be twice as many boarders as ever before."

"Can't we fix 'em just as we've always done?" asked Hy Allen.

"Either one of us can lick Val Manning," said Bill Jones.

Several more of the larger boys added their confident self-assurance that the boys of Ogleport were likely to be equal to any emergency which could possibly arise, but Zeb shook his head wisely as he remarked :

"That's all very well, so long as we only had old Sol to handle, but this new man's a very different sort of a fellow."

"I ain't afraid of him," said Hy Allen.

"Nor I."

"Nor I."

"Nor I," responded half a dozen voices, but Zeb Fuller again shook his head.

"That ain't it, boys; the new man's all right, and we must kind o' stand by him, but there'll be great times at the Academy this fall and winter, and we must be ready for 'em."

It was all very mysterious and oracular, nor could Zeb himself have fully explained his prophetic meaning, but he related to his friends how George Brayton had rescued him from the three vagabonds of Rodney, and not a boy of them but dimly comprehended the possibility of something new and stirring, if old Sol was to be reinforced by a man of that sort.

"I think, boys," said Zeb, at last, "it's our first duty to explore the Academy. Not one of us has been inside of it for two months."

There was no gainsaying a piece of generalship like that, and the conclave broke up immediately, only to find its way, in squads of various sizes, to the long double line of sheds at the back of the village green.

Under cover of these, it was easy enough to reach, unseen, a point directly in the rear of the barn-like white edifice which the wisdom of successive generations had consecrated to learning.

But it was not the outside of the Academy building which Zeb and his friends had come to explore.

Neither did they perplex themselves by fruitless attempts at any of the well-locked doors.

A board of proper length was promptly placed below one of the first-floor windows in the rear, not more than ten feet from the ground, and Hy Allen was clinging to the window-sill in a twinkling.

"Fastened on the inside," he exclaimed, after a fruitless effort.

"Come down, then," said Zeb. "We must try another."

And so they did, but with a result that was but faintly expressed by Zeb Fuller's final declaration:

"Something wrong, boys. Old Sol's been plotting against us again. It won't do for us to go around in front. Not in broad daylight. But we must look out for our rights. Next

thing we shall have a rebellion among the teachers after the school begins."

The symptoms threatened something of the kind, doubtless, but just then one of the smaller boys, who had been acting as a sort of scout or sentinel, came up with the intelligence that a large wagon was being hauled across the green, towards the Academy, and that it was accompanied by the principal himself, with two or three of the trustees and a stranger, on foot.

"Hurrah!" shouted Zeb. "That's the new apparatus. Boys, we're in the right place at the right time. It would never do to let that stuff be stowed away without our help. We'd never know where half of it went to."

No wonder the boys of Ogleport had such blind faith in Zeb Fuller's leadership.

When the wagon was pulled up in front of the steps leading to the door of the "lecture room," in the rear "addition" to the main building of the Academy, Dr. Dryer could hardly repress an exclamation of surprise at the amount and energy of the "popular aid" which awaited the unloading of that cargo of scientific goods.

Not that anything very remarkable showed itself through the numerous pine-boxes, but Mr. George Brayton, in the simplicity of his heart, deemed it a most encouraging sign that so many of his future pupils should take so deep an interest in such a matter.

At all events, the strong and willing hands of Zeb Fuller and the rest made the transfer of those boxes to the lecture-room floor a very brief and easy piece of work.

"Now, Mr. Brayton," said Zeb, "you'll want to show what's in them. I'll go for a hatchet and chisel, and we'll have 'em open."

"Bring a saw, too," said Brayton, but Dr. Dryer wagged his reverend head somewhat suspiciously. Never before had the boys of Ogleport taken so deep an interest in the affairs of the village institution.

That was a great day for Zeb and his friends, nevertheless. They could hardly be persuaded to go home to dinner.

The worst of it all, if Dr. Dryer had only known it, was the frequency with which the keen eyes of his pupils detected him in turning over to his assistant the various questions pro-

pounded by the excited "trustees" as to the use of this, that, and the other contrivance of glass or brass.

CHAPTER XII

NEWLY FOUND FRIENDS

WHEN Barnaby Vernon, at the close of his first day at Dr. Manning's, found himself alone in the really luxurious room assigned him for the night, it would have been too much to expect that he should at once go to bed and to sleep.

The events of the day, no less than his unaccustomed surroundings, combined to stir such a fever in his young blood as was not likely to cool down very soon.

"Major Montague isn't the man to give it up in that way," he said to himself, aloud. "He always seemed to take special care of that valise. No doubt he wants it back again. Now, too, he may get it into his head that there's money to be made, somehow, out of my new friends. Reckon I can trust Judge Danvers to take care of that. Anyhow, I'm so glad to get away. Hope it isn't too much of a change in Val's

plans. He doesn't seem to mind it, I should say. Must be a good deal of fun in catching fish."

Then, after a moment's silence, he continued :

"What a room this is ! Splendid thing to be rich and feel that all your money belongs to you. Not any swindling tricks for me, money or no money. Besides, the money that comes that way don't stay. Haven't I seen the major and the rest flush of it, a hundred times ? Then it was sure to go and they were hard up again. They'll bring up, one of these days, where the dogs can't get at them. Wonder what that big book is on the table ? Ha—that's a queer Bible. Saw one before on a steamboat. Saw another in a hotel. Best hotel I ever stopped at. Curious sort of book. It's what they preach about. Guess I'll look into it one of these days. Let me see, wasn't there something like that book away back there, years ago ? So there was. Then my father couldn't have been of Major Montague's kind. Wonder if my folks were Bible folks. Dr. Manning's are. Is that what makes 'em rich ? There's a good many things I don't know, and that's one of 'em."

A good many things, indeed, and Bar had got

into the right sort of hands to learn some of them.

Hours later, when at last sleep came to him, a dream came with it, and it seemed to him as if he were a very little boy indeed, and a very sweet-faced lady, whose way of smiling made him think of Mrs. Manning, held him on her knee while a tall, dark, pale-looking gentleman read to her from just such a big book as that on the table in his chamber.

Dreams are very curious things, as everybody knows, only it's the fashion to laugh at them, and so, perhaps, Barnaby ought to have laughed at his when he awoke.

He didn't, however, do any such thing, but he would have liked to know somebody well enough to tell it, and there was no such person, for him, in the wide world.

Bar was right, however, about Major Montague.

The preparations for the trip of the two boys to the seashore were such as could easily be made in half an hour, and they were off together on the early train, well supplied with all sorts of fishing-tackle, and brimful of high spirits and expectation.

Even Bar, however, had scarcely guessed how closely his movements had been followed the day before.

Scarcely had he been gone two hours, and while the doctor was busy with his morning list of "callers," among the latter came a gentleman whom the good physician thought he would have recognized, from Bar's description, even if he had not introduced himself as Major Montague.

Any one more profusely polite and so tremendously dignified at the same time, had not entered that reception-room in many a day.

"You have a young gentleman, a relative, I may say a ward, of mine visiting with you," remarked the major, unchilled by the manner of his reception. "I've done myself the honor to call and see you about him. Glad he's in such good hands, but ——"

"Oh! you mean Mr. Vernon?" bluntly interrupted the doctor. "He left the city this morning."

"Left the city!" exclaimed the major. "May I a-a-sk where he's gone?"

"Not of me, you can't," snapped the doctor.

"If you want to make any inquiries I must refer you to Mr. Vernon's counsel, Judge Danvers. I've nothing more to say. Excuse me, sir. I have patients to attend to. My time's not my own. Good-morning. John, show the gentleman out."

John was just the very man for that kind of duty, and Major Montague went down the front steps with the abiding assurance that he had never been turned out of any other house so politely and ceremoniously in all his life. He ought to have been a good judge of that sort of thing too.

Meantime, Bar and Val found themselves dashing away across country at the best speed of the Eastern express train, and they would have been more or less than boys if they had not set themselves at once to work on a general investigation of the character of their fellow-passengers.

Val might scarcely have been accurate or thorough, but there was something closely approaching professional skill in Bar's observations.

A little in front of them, across the passage, a double seat had been taken possession of, for the car was not crowded, by a somewhat feeble-

looking but very nice, middle-aged lady and one of the brightest, prettiest girls, of fifteen years or thereabouts, that either of the boys had ever seen.

That was all as it should be, but at the very first stopping-place, the car was entered by a flashily-dressed young man, of middle height, who took a brief survey of the passengers, from the door, and then walked deliberately forward and set himself down in the vacant seat by the side of the lady.

There was nothing in the established usages of railway traveling which should have made a positive crime of this, but there was something in the way the newcomer gazed at the fresh-faced girl opposite him which brought the blood to the face of Val Manning.

"The impudent scamp!" he muttered to Bar. "Why couldn't he have found another seat?"

"Keep still a bit," said Bar. "I know what he's up to, or I'm greatly mistaken."

If the ladies themselves were disturbed by the presence of the stranger, they were not disposed to make any public exhibition of their disgust.

It is true that the elder seemed to become more interested than before in the scenery through which the train was passing, and the younger took a sudden plunge into a book which had been lying neglected on her lap.

"That's just what he wants," said Bar to Val. "Anything to keep their eyes off him. There, that's it. He's a good deal clumsier than old Prosper."

It happened that, a few seats further on, a party of four gentlemen were sitting together in animated conversation, and the outer one of the two who were facing Bar and Val was a man of unusual size, though not of a particularly intellectual appearance.

He had not been paying any attention, that Val had noticed, to the operations of the flashy stranger, but now he suddenly exclaimed, or so it seemed :

"Keep your hand out of her pocket."

At the same moment he sprang to his feet as if in great astonishment, and so did the unwelcome companion of the two ladies.

"What do you mean, sir?" shouted the latter, with a face that was white and red by turns, but

then he added, or seemed to add, "I'll pick all the pockets in this car if I choose."

"You will, will you?" exclaimed the big man, in a voice whose lion-like depth of "roar" contrasted strangely with the tones of his previous remark. "I didn't say you had picked any pockets, but I don't mean you shall, either."

"I didn't say that," began the flashy man, but his next words were, "and I've dropped hers on the floor."

With that he put on such a look of abject terror as no human face can possibly counterfeit, and sprang away from his place, crying out:

"It must be the devil!"

"Very likely," responded the big man, as he started in pursuit, but there were other hands extended, and the frightened runaway was brought to an immediate stand.

Meantime, the ladies, scarcely less astonished than the pickpocket, had been making a hurried search.

"I have indeed lost my pocketbook, Sibyl," said the elder.

"And there it is, mother, on the floor, just where he said he had dropped it," exclaimed

Sibyl, but at that very moment Bar Vernon was picking it up.

"Thank you, sir," said Sibyl, as she took it in her hand, but Bar replied :

"You'd better open it at once and see if anything is missing."

"Why so?" asked Sibyl.

"Oh! miss," exclaimed Val, "do just as he says. It was his work detecting that man. He's a wonderful fellow."

The elder lady looked in Val's handsome, earnest young face, with a very motherly smile, as she said :

"Let me see, Sibyl. I've no doubt the boys are right. It won't do any harm."

The pocketbook was opened, but it was nearly empty.

"Exactly," remarked Bar. "Now he must be searched."

"You seem to know a good deal for a fellow of your age," very loudly and roughly exclaimed one of the bystanders. "We'd better look to your case. Who are you, anyway?"

"You here, too, Mr. Bonnet?" was Bar's quick rejoinder. "Gentlemen, here's another

man that mustn't get out of the car till the money's been found."

"Mr. Bonnet" made a sudden movement, but he found himself in the strong grasp of the big man.

There was no manner of use in struggling, but the latter asked our hero :

"You know these fellows, it seems ; are you a detective ?"

"What do you think about it ?" asked Bar. "I never saw either of them before, but I know that man for a professional pickpocket, and this one for his bonnet—his bully."

"One of 'em's got that money, then!" exclaimed the big man. "Come, my fine fellow, shell over. I knew the railroad company had set detectives on the express trains, but I'd never have taken them boys for 'em."

"Me ?" exclaimed Val, indignantly ; "I'm a son of Dr. Randall Manning, of New York, and this is my friend, Mr. Barnaby Vernon."

"It's all right," said the big man. "Go by any name you please. Only it's a great credit to the company, and I wonder they didn't think of it before."

At the word "detective," the two pickpockets seemed to give the matter up, and in a minute more the ladies had counted their returned "valuables," and declared them all right.

"Now, Mr. Vernon," said the big man to Bar, "what are we to do with these men?"

"Put them in charge of the conductor," said Bar. "I've got another errand on hand."

It happened, however, that when the conductor, who speedily arrived, was appealed to, he at once produced from another car, a "sure enough" official detective, and the big man winked at Bar, and said:

"Of course. You know just what to do. Bill," he added to one of his friends, "look at that. Those two fellows would swear neither of 'em ever saw the other before, and yet we've seen, with our own eyes, how one of 'em catches the birds, and the other's right on hand to cage 'em. It's just splendid, and it's a great credit to the company. I wonder they never thought of it before. By-the-way, who was it shouted at that pickpocket first?"

That was a hard question to answer.

The two ladies, not being by any means so

“sharp” as the big man deemed himself, felt sure that the boys looked more than a little annoyed by the peculiar impression they seemed to have created, and the elder turned and beckoned to Val.

“Did you say,” she asked, as he came across and bent forward towards her, “that you are a son of Dr. Manning?”

“Yes, madam,” said Val.

“He was my father’s family physician at one time. My name is Brayton. Ask your friend to come over here. I must thank him for saving me my money.”

Bar came readily enough, but he was a little inclined to stand upon his dignity until he found that Mrs. Brayton was quite disposed to accept Val’s account of “himself and friend.”

Then, indeed, the boys were both quite contented to sit down with their new acquaintances, and Mrs. Brayton was not many minutes in ascertaining not only their present errand but their after destination. Not that she learned either from Bar, but Val was very much of a boy, and ready to be communicative with a “former patient of his father.”

"Going to school at Ogleport Academy?" exclaimed Sibyl. "Why, mother, how strange! That is where George has gone."

"Your brother?" said Bar. "Then we shall make his acquaintance, of course. Is he older than you?"

"Oh, yes, a good deal," laughed Sibyl. "He has gone there as assistant principal, and I hope he will make you mind him as well as I have to, when he's at home."

"Is he such a severe fellow?" asked Val. "I shall look out for him."

"You'd better," said Sibyl, but her mother added:

"I feel pretty sure he will do his duty, but he's not a man anybody need be afraid of."

With so much of a foundation to go on, the boys made fine headway with their remaining conversation, nor were they at all disappointed when the train at last reached their own destination, to find that Mrs. Brayton and Sibyl were also "at home."

To be sure, Bar and Val had still a stage ride of some miles to the little village on the coast where they were to do their fishing, but they

promised to run over and call on their new friends before returning to the city.

“On the whole, Bar,” said Val, “and thanks to you, this has been about the tallest bit of railway riding I ever did in my life.”

CHAPTER XIII

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

DR. DRYER and his trustees did not care to remain for any great length of time after the opening of what, in their eyes, were little better than scientific toys and curiosities, so that before the close of the day George Brayton and the boys were left in sole possession.

“ You’re not going to leave all these things out here on the tables over night ? ” said Zeb Fuller, inquiringly.

“ We won’t have time to put them away in proper order,” said Brayton. “ We must have some new cupboards made expressly for them.”

“ But they might get injured,” said Zeb.

“ Is there any danger of that ? ” asked Brayton. “ Who’d want to hurt them ? ”

“ I don’t know, exactly,” replied Zeb, “ only it seems a risk.”

“ Are any of the smaller boys mischievous ? ” asked Brayton. “ If they are, I’ll tell you how

to fix it. Just let it be understood that this lot of apparatus is the special property of the older boys of Ogleport, and that you mean to take care of it. None of it'll run away. It can't even fly as well as Dr. Dryer's cows."

Zeb blushed to his ears, but Hy Allen responded :

"Tell you what, Mr. Brayton, that's just the thing. We'll whale the skin off any boy that meddles with our appyrattus. Boys, let's take a good look at the windows before we go."

"There ain't a boy in Ogleport that'd touch one of them things," exclaimed Bill Jones. "Zeb and Hy and me can answer for that, but ——"

Bill hesitated, and Brayton said :

"Are there any hard cases among the boarders, then? We can have our cupboards finished by the time they get here, but they might break 'em open. Then where'd all our experiments go to?"

"Don't know about that," said Zeb. "We can't tell who's coming and who ain't, just yet, but we'll keep an eye on 'em when they come."

"That's right," replied Brayton. "If you fellows'll go in with me we can have a grand time

of it, this fall and winter. You see, I'm a good deal of a stranger yet, and I shall have to ask your advice about a good many things."

"We'll be on hand!" exclaimed Hy Allen. "If you want to know anything about Ogleport, you just ask Zeb Fuller. It's just the same as if you'd asked the whole crowd."

"You see," explained Zeb, "we village boys all pull together, and sometimes the rest don't know enough to agree with us. That's where they get into trouble, you know, and old Sol—the Rev. Dr. Dryer, I mean—he used to side with them generally."

"And then he got into trouble, eh?" laughed Brayton. "Well, now I think our goods are safe enough for to-night. We'll get better acquainted with them and with each other one of these days."

Brayton was preparing to close and lock the door behind them all, as he spoke, and in a moment more he was striding away across the green towards the house of Dr. Dryer.

Zeb Fuller stood at the foot of the steps, looking after Brayton till he was out of hearing, and then he turned to his friends with:

“Boys, that’s the kind of teacher I like. Not the slightest sign of insubordination.”

“He’s a trump!” exclaimed Hy.

To this declaration, which expressed more clearly than Zeb had done the popular verdict, there was an audible hum of assent, and Bill Jones added :

“Safe! Why, Zeb Fuller, them gimcracks in there are as safe as if they were in a church. Nobody will dream of touching them unless ’twas us.”

“I’ve my doubts,” said Zeb, profoundly. “No village is safe where there’s such a raft of ministers and deacons and doctors and trustees and such. We must do our duty, boys. Oh, but wouldn’t I like to try a chemical experiment on old Sol!”

The conclave broke up amid a storm of suggestions, but Zeb was probably thinking of something which could be done with a retort.

As for Mr. George Brayton, that vigorous young gentleman had remarked to himself, as he walked away :

“They’re rather above the average, take the whole lot, through, and that Zeb Fuller is no or-

dinary boy. Now that I have him the rest will follow like a flock of sheep. I must do what I can to make a man of Zeb, but I hope I'm not such a fool as to try to cork him up. He'd burst the whole Academy. No wonder Dr. Dryer's afraid of him."

Brayton did not look as if he were likely to be very much afraid of anything in particular, and he had just won the only complete victory that had ever been gained over the boys of Ogleport.

Even then, however, he would not have been astonished if he had overheard Zeb's last remarks to Hy and Bill.

"You see, boys, that's Brayton's end of the Academy. Now, we must go to work on old Sol and the main building. There's plenty of room for improvement there."

Very likely, but scarcely of the kind contemplated by Zebedee Fuller.

Thenceforward, for several days, the tide of human events rolled onward peacefully enough for the people of Ogleport.

George Brayton learned, without a tremor of dissatisfaction, the adverse decision of Mrs. Dr.

Dryer. She had never smiled so sweetly or exhibited her false teeth to such entire perfection as when she recommended him to Mrs. Wood's.

If Effie herself would have been better pleased with the idea of such excellent company in the house, she at least said nothing about it. Her only remark on the subject was :

"But, Mr. Brayton, somebody ought to warn you. Are you afraid of ghosts?"

"Not much. Why?"

"Why, the Wood's mansion is said to be haunted. The ghosts never come in pleasant weather, but the first frost brings them back again."

"Spend their summers at the watering-places, do they?" said Brayton. "Very fashionable ghosts, I should say, these!"

"Very, only they have sometimes scared away boarders for Mrs. Wood."

"Tell you what I'll do if they trouble me," said Brayton.

"What is it?" asked Effie.

"I'll set Zeb Fuller and his boys after them."

"That would do," laughed Effie, merrily. "I

do believe if Zeb Fuller met a ghost he'd insist on shaking hands."

"He's very much that kind of a boy," said Brayton. "I've engaged him and Hy Allen and half-a-dozen more of the same class to assist me in keeping the Academy in order this fall and winter."

Effie opened her eyes, but she comprehended the strategy of the new teacher, and that was more than Mrs. Dryer or her husband could have done.

The afternoon that Brayton moved his goods and chattels to the widow's house, Mrs. Dryer remarked to the doctor :

"You'll have double responsibility this winter. I see clearly how it'll be. Mr. Brayton lacks dignity. He'll have no control, whatever. Those boys'll ride right over him. I heard him speak to that Fuller boy to-day, and he actually touched his hat to him, just as if he'd been a trustee."

Dr. Dryer groaned, but he searched his mind in vain for a recollection of the occasion when George Brayton had exhibited that amount of reverence for the principal of the Academy.

"I shall undoubtedly be compelled to exercise

especial vigilance," he calmly replied, "but I consider myself competent to confront the emergency."

Splendid words they were, and the longest that occurred to him at the moment, but his better-half, that is, his "third," was hardly comforted, even while she admired.

There were other houses in Ogleport which would gladly have opened their doors to such a boarder as George Brayton, but he was wise for so young a man, and most of them contained only too many of the things classed as "comforts of a home"—even sons and grown-up daughters.

So he took Mrs. Dryer's advice and decided to sojourn with the Widow Wood.

Fat and active and fussy was the widow, bearing her three-score years lightly enough, though with a dim idea that she was the oldest inhabitant of Ogleport, and, by good rights, the most important person in the village.

Old Judge Wood had been a great man in his day, at least in his own estimation.

He had meant to found a fortune and a family, but had somehow failed to do either.

He had, however, built the biggest and costli-

est house in all that region of country, and then had died before he had put the second coat of paint on it.

He left his widow so nearly just enough to squeeze along on, that she had never seen her way clearly to that second coat of paint, or indeed, to any other sort of finishing up, and the great roomy mansion had held up its bare, square nakedness of weather-beaten pine, on the gentle slope towards the little river, for a quarter of a century.

Even the trees refused to keep very close company with such a curious embodiment of ancient respectability, and all the winds of heaven, as well as all the hot summer suns, had the fairest kind of a chance at it.

Still, the Wood mansion was by all odds the best boarding house in Ogleport, for its lady-owner was a notable housekeeper, and had a special pride in the character of her guests.

“Haunted!” said George Brayton to himself, when he had finished unpacking his books in the big, second-floor front room, of which the widow made him temporary lord. “Haunted! It looks very much like it. But I don’t wonder the ghosts

keep out of it in summer. There's a perfect glare of light in it, from one end to the other. She doesn't seem to suspect what the blinds were made for."

Zeb Fuller had struck a new idea that day. He had happened along in front of the Widow Wood's, as Zeb was very apt to happen along, just when Brayton was making his transfer, and he had promptly offered his services.

"Yes, Zeb, thank you," replied Brayton. "Just carry up those dumb-bells to my room."

The pointing finger left no doubt as to what was meant, but Zeb incautiously remarked:

"I never saw that kind of a hammer before. What's it for?"

The explanation that followed, with incidental references to Indian clubs, boxing-gloves, lifting machines and baseball, was a sort of a new revelation to the Ogleport champion, and Brayton had unconsciously completed the conquest he had so well begun at the lecture-room.

"Who ever heard before," thought Zeb, "of a teacher who knew more than any of the boys?"

It was the first time any such phenomena had been seen in Ogleport.

"Fact," he said to himself; "I'm beginning to be afraid we ain't able to teach him anything. Seems so very ready and willing to learn, too. Very different from old Sol."

He was walking down the street, half an hour later, when he was hailed by Hy Allen.

"Zeb, did y'hear 'bout Puff Evans's boat?"

"No, what of it?"

"Sold on execution, to-morrow, down in front of Runner's tavern. Don't I wish I could buy it!"

"Awful hard on Puff," said Zeb. "He made it himself, and it's the best boat on the lake."

"Won't fetch much," said Hy. "Sorry for Puff. It's just a game of some of them lawyers."

"Anyhow, we'd better be there," said Zeb. "Maybe we can bid it up a little for Puff. How'll he ever go a-fishing without it? Then, if Puff can't fish, he'll die."

"Reckon that's so," said Hy. "P'r'aps they'd ha' levied on him, on'y the boat's worth more'n he is."

"Sell for more in Ogleport," remarked Zeb. "Puff's the best fisherman on the lake, but I wouldn't care to own him. Now, Hy, I've got

something more to tell you 'bout the new teacher. I've taken that young man right in hand."

"Hope he'll turn out better than old Sol," said Hy.

"Hiram," said Zeb, "I'm afraid Solomon's a failure. I give him up, but I've great hopes of George Brayton."

Hy was quite ready to listen, for every day was bringing the fall term nearer, and school matters were assuming a place of first-class importance in the minds of the boys of Ogleport.

CHAPTER XIV

A SHARPER OUTWITTED

BAR and Val had a splendid time at the seashore. Never before had the former passed a week of such thoroughgoing enjoyment.

It was grand fun to catch fish; the very sailing and rowing were a kind of new life; every crab and clam they laid their hands on was a sort of new wonder. Still, if Bar had tried to analyze his feelings he would have found that, after all, the secret of his happiness was the fact that his "new time" was daily becoming more and more of a clear and clean and beautiful reality.

Val Manning was capital company, and they made more than one trip to the quiet and pleasant little home of Mrs. Brayton and Sibyl. The widow, for such she was, seemed always glad to see them, and Sibyl was sure to have something more to tell them about "George," who seemed, indeed, to be a sort of human idol in the mind of his very pretty sister.

That sort of thing, nice as it was, had an end at last, and Bar experienced a halfway gloomy sensation at finding himself once more on his way to the great city.

Their stay there was to be brief, as previously decided, but Bar had one more good, long talk with the judge and the doctor.

"I wish," said the former, "that you could open your valise now, but that's impossible. I wouldn't have you break your word for anything. I'll tell you, however, one thing I wish you'd do. Every time you recall, or think you do, anything that happened away back, before you began to live with Major Montague, I wish you would write it down."

"Has he been to see you while I was gone?" asked Bar.

"I think he was in my office once while I was out," replied the judge; "but he must have seen something or somebody there he didn't like, for he hasn't turned up since."

"He's not a man to give up anything," said Bar; "but he can hardly find me as far away as Ogleport."

"Hardly," said the doctor; "and now, Barnaby,

we both hope you will give a good account of yourself at the Academy. You will have to study pretty hard at first."

"I suppose so," said Bar. "Val knows a great many things that I have never heard of."

"Keep your courage up, though," said Judge Danvers. "I mean to make a lawyer of you one of these days. You're just built for one."

Kind friends they were, and Bar felt a curious glow at his heart twenty times before he and Val got away, as he found how well and thoughtfully his various wants had been foreseen and provided for.

"He'll spend the whole of that thousand dollars," said Bar to himself, "before he gets through with me. Well, I'll pay him, somehow, some day. Meantime I'll be a right good friend to Val. He's a tip-top sort of a fellow, too."

As for Val, that young gentleman could hardly find words to tell his mother all his satisfaction with his wonderful new chum.

"He knows everything but books, mother," he said, "and you couldn't get him to do a mean thing. I'm ever so glad he's going with me."

Then there came a leave-taking, which made

Bar sick with the thought of what a wonderful thing it is to have a live father and mother. Then there followed an all-night ride, by rail, then a morning change of cars, and then a stage that took the two schoolboys to Ogleport from a direction opposite to that by which George Brayton had reached the same destination.

The "stage" was a long-bodied, flat-topped, four seated vehicle, that, in that warm weather, was left open to the dust and surrounding scenery on all sides. The boys had the back seat, wide enough for three, and immediately in front of them was a pair of decently well-dressed, middle-aged men, who got in at one of the villages through which they passed.

Neither of these gentry seemed to need more than a glance at Bar and Val to fix their identity as "Academy boys," and they talked away unreservedly.

"No," said one, the sharper and harder-faced of the two, "I ain't goin' straight through. Got to stop at Ogleport and make sure of Puff Evans's boat."

"What do you want of a boat?" asked his companion.

“Why, you know I bought in the Peters’s place, up at the Rodney end of the lake, and I’m going to move in this week. There’s a good boat-house but no boat. Ain’t any good one around, that I know of, except Puff’s, so I laid for that.”

“I know, but then he wouldn’t sell it for any money. Made it himself, and it’s worth fifty or sixty.”

“Guess likely, but it won’t cost me that. You see, Puff goes on spree every few months, and he’s awful kerless about his tavern bills. So I found one up in Rodney, bought it for most nothing, sued and got judgment on it, and levied on the boat.”

“What’s the judgment?”

“Costs and all, fifteen dollars. Cost me about five, and I’m willing to go five more. That’ll make the boat net me ten dollars.”

“Cheap enough. But s’pose Puff pays up?”

“Nobody’ll trust him with that much money. Besides, I can get another squeeze on him, if he should. I’m bound to have that boat. The stage’ll get in just about half an hour before the time. It’ll be down at Runner’s tavern and I

can catch a ride home, or go up on the night stage."

It all sounded very businesslike and matter-of-course, but Bar looked at Val with his finger on his lip. Pretty much the same idea was passing through both their busy heads.

They had not intended to do any eaves-dropping, but they could scarcely have helped overhearing what they had, and, when their luggage was discharged at the Widow Wood's, they astonished that good old lady by clearing out, within two minutes, on the plea of an important errand in the village.

Runner's tavern was away down at the northern end of the main street, and was a curiously dilapidated kind of a country hostelry. It had been, however, time out of mind, the place appointed for the performance of petty "constables' sales," and on this day, at noon, quite a little crowd had assembled in front of it, less with any idea of "bidding" than with a mild curiosity to see what would become of Puff Evans's boat.

Puff himself had been on hand half the morning, and had, with wonderful self-control for

him, kept rigidly away from the door of the tavern barroom.

Tall, lank, red-headed, weak-faced, with a strong tendency to wear his hands in his pockets and to blow out his irresolute cheeks in the style which had gained him his nickname, but for all that Puff Evans had not a single personal enemy in either Ogleport or Rodney.

Indeed, he received an abundance of sympathy over the admitted hardness of his case, especially from the boys.

Thus far, however, Puff had been utterly unable to crystallize that sympathy into anything that resembled coin or bank-notes, and he was now standing with his shoeless feet wide apart, mournfully gazing at the "notice of sale" which his moderate learning did not enable him to read.

Zeb Fuller was on hand as a matter of course, and well backed up, too, so far as numbers went, but Zeb's pocket was only a very little better off, in that emergency, than Puff's own, though with fewer holes in it.

"This is mighty hard on Puff, isn't it, Gershom?" said Zeb to the fat old miller, as the latter waddled dignifiedly past the crowd.

"What is it, Zeb? Come here," replied the miller. "Do you want to buy?"

"Only to keep Puff Evans from drowning himself," said Zeb. "It's only fifteen dollars, and the boat's worth four times that much. I've got three."

"I'll lend you the other twelve!" exclaimed Gershom Todderley, pulling out his wallet, "and you and I can own the boat together till you can pay me. We can let Puff use it, can't we?"

"The very thing!" exclaimed Zeb. "You're an honor to Ogleport, Brother Todderley."

Gershom looked at the incorrigible youngster with a very dignified sort of wheeze, but Zeb went back to the crowd feeling like a Rothschild.

In a moment more the customary and monotonous, "How much 'm I offered," was responded to by a bid of five dollars from the Rodney attorney, who had "come for that boat."

"Five, goin' at five—five—do I hear any more?"

"Ten," responded Zeb.

The Rodney man started and looked hard at Zeb.

"No bids from boys," he began, but the auctioneer promptly responded :

"If Zeb Fuller's a boy, whar'd General Jackson git his army. Ten, ten—going at ten—do I hear any more?"

"Eleven!"

"Twelve!" shouted Zeb, and then he added, "Won't do, Skinner, my boy; I'd never forgive myself if I let you go a boating and get drowned."

"Thirteen!" exclaimed Skinner.

"Fourteen!" from Zeb.

"Fourteen, goin' at fourteen ——"

"Fourteen and a 'alf!" from Skinner.

"Fifteen!" said Zeb, quickly, but with a shivery sort of feeling that he had got to the end of his rope.

The Rodney attorney was inclined to dally a little, and the auctioneer came very near knocking down the prize to Zeb before that fatal "'alf" was added that carried him out of his depth.

If he had only had time to call for a collection of quarters from among the boys, or to make another pull on old Gershom Todderley.

Nobody else looked as if they intended to dispute the matter, and lawyer Skinner began to think he would get his boat cheap enough, when a clear, strong, though somewhat boyish voice, capped the last bid with : "Sixteen !"

And all eyes were turned towards the newcomer, while Skinner growled :

"More boys? Come, now, this won't do, Mr. What's-your-name?"

"My name's Cash," quietly responded Bar Vernon, as the auctioneer went on with :

"Sixteen, sixteen ! do I hear any more ?"

"Seventeen !" said Skinner, raspishly.

"Twenty," responded Bar ; "let's make it interesting."

"Twenty-one," shouted the now exasperated Skinner.

"Twenty-two !" said Bar, and even Zeb Fuller gave a shout of exultation and remarked :

"Skinner, my son, you've got to give full value for that ark if you get it. You ain't so much in danger of drowning as you was."

But the Rodney lawyer had no idea of any such wickedness as paying full value for that or

any other thing, and the auctioneer hammered away in vain.

“Come,” said Zeb, encouragingly—“come, Skinner, my dear fellow, if a man’s drowned he’ll never be hung. It’s your best chance. Try him again. Say three, now.”

But Skinner was getting sulky over his defeat, and, before he could quite make up his mind to raise the bid, the hammer fell.

“What name?” said the auctioneer.

“Cash,” said Barnaby, and the “best boat on the lake” was all his own.

That is, he and Val Manning owned it between them, for they had decided to “go halves” on the purchase-money.

As for Lawyer Skinner, that gentleman somewhat rapidly withdrew himself from the gaze of the crowd of boys and the tantalizing remarks of Zeb Fuller.

“Well, Mr. Cash,” said Zeb to our hero, “you’ve got the boat, but who’s to pay Puff Evans’s funeral expenses, I’d like to know?”

“Which one is he?” asked Bar.

“The gentleman yonder that reminds you of Daniel Webster,” said Zeb, pointing at the half-

stunned and altogether bewildered builder of the boat. "I've some business to attend to over at the mill, but I'll call for the coroner on my way back."

So saying he was off, without waiting for Bar's reply, for his disappointment with reference to that boat had been the severest blow Zeb had received for many a day. Besides, he was really anxious to return the miller's money with as little delay as might be.

"Puff," said Bar, as he walked up to that worthy, "where's the boat?"

"Down t' the lake. Right by my house," replied Puff, vacantly. "She's a beauty, but all the money I had in the world was ten dollars. Skinner's as mean as pusley, but I don't know as I blame you. Going to bring her over to town and put her in Todderley's pond?"

"Not so bad as that," said Bar. "Do you suppose you know enough to take good care of her?"

"Why," said Puff, "I built her myself, and she's just the neatest little thing. Mast and sail, too. Runs as if she was greased."

"Well," said Bar, "what'll you charge me to

keep her for me? You to use her all the time, same as if you owned her, and I to have her once in awhile to go fishing in."

"Charge?" exclaimed Puff, opening his eyes. "Charge? You git eout."

"Well, then," said Bar, "you go back home and look sharp after that boat. One of these days I'll come over and take a look at her."

"I say, mister!" exclaimed Puff, as the advantages of Bar's proposition slowly dawned on him, "won't ye come in and take suthin'?"

"Not a drop," said Bar; "nor you won't, either. That's the way you lost your boat."

"Fact, mister," said Puff, "but I tell ye what. I'd like to have a sheer in that boat. Won't ye let me?"

"Of course," said Bar, "if you'll keep dark about it. If lawyer Skinner knew it he'd be after it again."

"Say ten dollars' wuth, then," said Puff. "'Pears like I couldn't ketch no fish in another man's boat."

"All right," said Bar. "Call it ten dollars' worth, if that'll do you any good."

"Wall, then," said Puff, drawing himself up

straighter than he had done before during that day, "there's the money, cash down."

"Oh, never mind that," said Bar; "pay when you get ready."

"No, ye don't," said Puff. "Take that, or I shan't feel honest. There's somethin' comin' to me from the sale over'n above the jedgment. I shan't go home empty. I ain't sure but what it's a pooty good job for me, anyhow, and old Skinner's beat, too; I'm right down glad o' that."

Bar consented to take the money, and he and Val returned to Mrs. Wood's, congratulating themselves on the splendid beginning they had made for their fun at Ogleport.

"We can fish pretty much all the time till school opens," said Val, "and then there's evenings and Saturdays after that."

"We won't want to fish all our spare time," said Bar. "There must be piles and piles of things to make fun out of around such a place as this is."

"So there are," said Val, "but we mustn't be careless of our money. I'm glad we've beaten that rascally lawyer as cheaply as we have. I mean to write my father all about it."

“He’d have done it himself, I know,” said Bar.

There could be small doubt of that.

CHAPTER XV

THE MYSTERY OF THE DUN HEIFER

"BROTHER TODDERLEY," said Zeb to the miller, "we're defeated in our benevolent intentions. Puff's boat went for twenty-two dollars."

"Who got it?" asked the miller.

"A bloated young aristocrat from the city," said Zeb. "I suspect him of being one of the new boarders. The Academy's going to ruin, Gershom. There's your twelve dollars, with my sincere thanks."

"Sorry, Zeb, very sorry," remarked the miller; but another voice broke in with:

"Who'd ha' thought that of him? Thryin' to rob a poor chap like Poof Evans! It's worrus than wantin' to dhrown old Dochter Dhryer."

"Patrick Murphy," replied Zeb, "what do you know about war? Hullo, there goes poor Puff on his way home. I haven't the heart even to try and comfort him. Tell you what I'll do, Brother Todderley, I'll give my share towards buying him the timber to build another boat."

"You're a good boy, Zeb," responded the miller. "I'll do my share, and he can have anything he wants out of my lumber. Do you hear that, Pat?"

"Troth an' I do, sor," replied Pat. "Wull it be the crukked shticks I'll give him?"

"Crooked sticks!" exclaimed the miller.

"Sure an' he's one of 'em," said Pat. "He niver'd worruk well with straight ones."

"Never mind, Pat," replied Zeb, "it's a solemn thing for Puff. Just look at him. I never saw him walk so fast before."

"Indade," said Pat, "it's ginerally walkin' behind he's been iver since I've known him."

Plenty of sympathy poor Puff was getting, though he knew it not, but it would all have been too late to save his boat for him if it had not been for Bar and Val.

These latter had put in their time, before dinner, in a very vigorous process of taking possession of their room, which was all a schoolboy could or should have asked for, though hardly as luxurious in its aspect or appliances as the one Val Manning had been accustomed to at home.

As for Bar Vernon, he had seen all sorts of ac-

The Mystery of the Dun Heifer 189

commodations in his day, and was disposed to take a rose-colored view of every item belonging to his present quarters.

By dinner-time the boys were in a high state of preparation for it, so far as appetite went, but they were hardly expecting the sort of company that awaited them on their entering the dining-room.

“Mr. Manning! Mr. Vernon! My name is Brayton. Glad to see you both. My mother and sister have written me about you.”

It was a bit of a surprise to find that their teacher was also to be their fellow-boarder, but neither Val nor Bar was the kind of boy to repel so very frank and kindly a greeting.

In fact, before the meal was over, Brayton had even heard the story of the boat, as well as Bar's repeated lamentations over his deficiencies.

“Come up into my room,” he said, with reference to the latter. “I can hardly advise you what to do till we've had some further talk.”

Up they went, and they saw quite enough, at once, to give them a good opinion of their new friend.

Bar picked up a book which was lying on the table.

"French," said Brayton. "One of George Sands's novels. One of these days you'll get ready to take hold of such things."

"Oh!" exclaimed Val, "he's picked up French. He talked German, too, for an hour at a time, with an old fellow we met at the seashore."

"Indeed," exclaimed Brayton. "Do you know anything of Greek or Latin, Mr. Vernon?"

"No, not a word; but I understand Spanish, and can talk it a little."

"English, French, German, Spanish, at seventeen! That'll do. I'm not afraid of the rest. Your trouble won't be in languages, but you've plenty of work cut out for you. I'll take you in hand, at once, myself. Three hours' study a day, my young friend, from now till school opens."

"There goes the fishing, Bar," exclaimed Val, mournfully.

"No, it don't," said Brayton. "To-morrow morning, Bar, you are to take your Latin grammar with you and go to the lake. I'll hear you recite when you get home. Next day, Greek.

The Mystery of the Dun Heifer 191

Next, something else. Read right ahead, whether you understand it or not. We'll see about that afterwards."

It seemed a curious way to begin with a new scholar, but it was the only method Brayton could think of for finding out precisely where Bar was, intellectually, and what he had better try to do with him. Such an odd fish of a scholar he had never before come in contact with.

That afternoon the boys went over to the Academy with their new friend, and became as well posted as Zeb Fuller himself in the quantities and qualities of the various apparatus, old as well as new. Val took Bar, while Brayton was busy in the lecture-room, and showed him over the whole building.

"Have you cut your name anywhere?" asked Bar.

"No," said Val, "but every boy is expected to before he goes away. If he does it too soon they expel him."

"I see," laughed Bar. "Is that the bell-rope?"

They were near the great front door of the main hall as he spoke, and Val answered :

"Yes, but I wonder what it's down for. If Zeb Fuller knew it there'd be music before twelve o'clock to-night."

"Who's Zeb Fuller?"

"The boy that chaffed you about Puff Evans," said Val. "He's one of the crowd that was too much for me last term. He's a queer duck, but we must give him a lesson before long."

"Or he'll give us one," said Bar. "Well, we'll see about that."

Val Manning was more than half right about that bell-rope. Zeb Fuller did know that it was "down," and there was "music" before twelve o'clock that night.

"Hiram Allen," Zeb said to his next friend, as they came back from driving the cows to pasture, "this is a sad piece of business about Puff Evans and his boat. I think the Academy bell ought to be tolled."

"Maybe he won't drown himself, after all," said Hy.

"Perhaps. Indeed, I fear not," replied Zeb; "but he ought to, and so we must do our duty, not only by him but by the bell. It must be tolled, Hiram."

The Mystery of the Dun Heifer 193

"If we can get in."

"I ascertained the condition of one of the front windows the day the new apparatus came," said Zeb.

That was quite enough, under the circumstances. The people of Ogleport retired to slumber as usual that night, only to be awakened a little after eleven by a most unusual, irregular, spasmodic chaos of sound from the one bell in the village which they had last dreamed of hearing from.

Bar and Val were both awakened by it, and dressed themselves with a truly boyish instinct that there was some kind of fun abroad.

"What can it be?" asked Bar.

"Zeb Fuller, of course," said Val; "only there isn't the least chance in the world of his being caught at it. We must get out on the green and see what we can see."

They were joined on the stairs by George Brayton, but he at once understood their entire innocence in the matter of the bell.

A hideous, intermittent clamor was that which was now pouring down from the old belfry, and various half-dressed figures were beginning to flit

through the moonlight that was pouring over the wide and shadowy green.

One of these figures, full of extraordinary wisdom, made its way straight to the front gate of Deacon Fuller's residence.

Hardly had a hand been laid upon the gate-latch, however, before the door of the house swung open and the agile form of Zebedee Fuller, busily tugging at his half-donned trousers, stood on the threshold, with his father close behind him.

"Ah!" exclaimed Zeb. "The Rev. Dr. Dryer? Isn't there something the matter with the Academy bell, doctor?"

"Matter?" repeated the astonished principal. "Are you really here? I freely confess that the occurrence exceeds the moderate capacity of my comprehension. Just listen to that bell!"

"Something the matter with it, beyond a doubt," said Zeb. "It don't toll as if it was meant for a funeral. If it is, I should say that funeral had been drinking too much."

Dr. Dryer could not wait for any more of Zeb Fuller's moralizing, but pulled his cotton night-

cap closer over his ears as he hurried away towards the Academy.

Others, less thoughtful than himself of the probable source of all Ogleport mischief, had directed their steps and energies to what seemed the sure capture of the untimely bell-ringer, whoever he might be.

There came in the puzzle.

Not a door was open, front or rear. Every window was closed. There was not a sign of human entrance about the entire exterior of the Academy building.

George Brayton had the key of the rear entrance, but even while some of the rest had gone for lights, the doctor arrived, and with him the means of throwing open the great front doors.

Then, indeed, a flood of splendid moonlight was poured in upon the mystery—only moonshine leaves every mystery as badly off as it finds it.

There, in the middle of the main hall, from which on either side the schoolrooms opened, a few paces only from the front doorway, stood Dr. Dryer's favorite dun heifer, with the bell-rope firmly webbed around her horns and a

peck-measure of green apples on the floor within what would have been easy reach but for the hindrance of that rope.

Small blame to the heifer if she smelled those apples and strove to reach them, and even less to the rope and the bell if among them they waked up all Ogleport as a consequence.

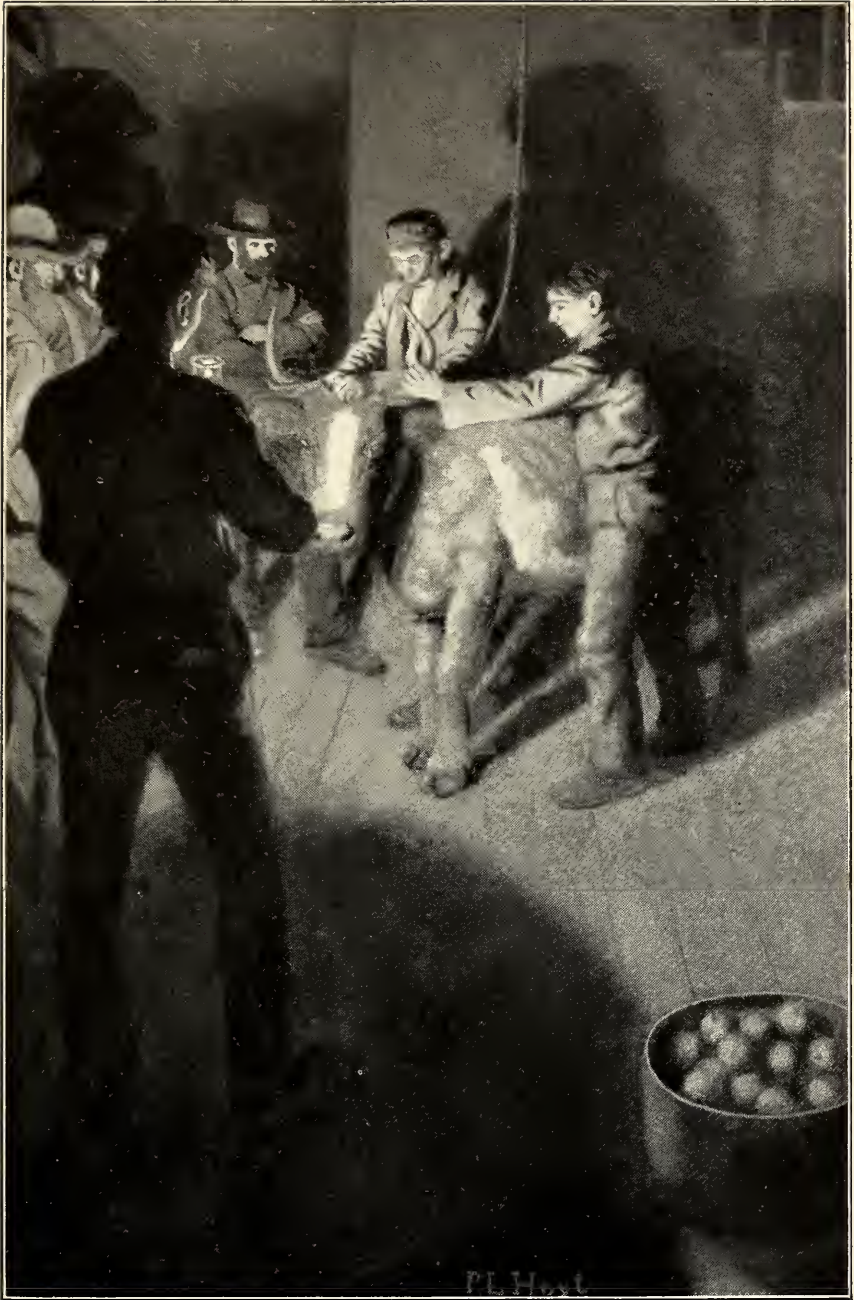
Loud and long laughed the hitherto indignant representatives of the Board of Trustees. Clear and ringing was the laugh of George Brayton. Only less decided was that of Val Manning, but Bar Vernon was as mute as Dr. Dryer himself, and did but move around and look and search and study, for he had unconsciously undertaken the problem which was shortly to baffle entirely the mental acumen of his elders.

“How did that heifer get into the Academy?”

There was not a dissenting voice, when some one suggested:

“Zebedee Fuller!”

But Dr. Dryer had already ascertained that the evil genius of Ogleport had been at home and in bed, and, granting as an axiom his agency in the matter, the question clouded down upon them with a yet more Egyptian darkness.



“HOW DID ZEB FULLER GET THAT HEIFER INTO THE ACADEMY?”

"How did Zeb Fuller get that heifer into the Academy?"

The doctor had released his tantalized property quickly enough, and there were boys at hand to volunteer her escort to her own "lot," but he himself remained to grapple with the mystery.

"Only one safety just now," remarked Brayton. "We must take away the rope altogether till school begins. I'll go up and do it at once."

"And I'll go with you," said Bar.

Val's services were also offered, but Dr. Dryer remarked that "two would be as large a number as the occasion demanded," and Val was compelled to remain below.

The steeple was not a very lofty affair, but there was some climbing to be done, nevertheless, and both Bar and Brayton paused for breath on a sort of "deck," twenty feet at least above the ridge of the main building, and as many more below the bell.

"What's this wheel for?" asked Bar, as he closely scrutinized a bit of machinery firmly set on the deck. "It seems not to be used."

"Looks like an old tolling gear," said Brayton. "There's another pulley-wheel to match it, up

there by the bell, I fancy. They've changed the gearing now, and don't use this any more. That's a pokerish sort of place to climb into by moonlight, and those cleats are frail things to step on."

"I'm lighter than you are," said Bar, and, without another word, up he went.

"That's no ordinary boy," said Brayton to himself, and in another minute or so the rope, disengaged from the bell-gearing, came rattling down upon the deck beside him, and could be slipped through to the lower floors and removed beyond the reach of mysterious heifers and evil-disposed boys.

Bar followed the rope quickly, and George Brayton's keen eyes noted with what an easy, confident, unhesitating movement the boy glided down the frail and quivering framework.

The Academy bell-tower had been standing a long time, and, although it was stanch enough, it could hardly be called immovable.

The greatest trial of that night to the Rev. Dr. Dryer was the fact that Zebedee Fuller had been in bed, and that so he had no decent excuse for any attempt to question him concerning the misdeeds of the dun heifer.

CHAPTER XVI

A MESS OF FISH

THE next morning, at breakfast, Mrs. Wood's boarders found a capital mess of fresh perch and pickerel on the table, and she remarked to them :

" You are eating Mr. Vernon's fish."

" How's that ? " asked Val.

" Why," said Mrs. Wood, " Puff Evans came to the door with them, ready cleaned, by the time we were up, and left them with his respects to Mr. Vernon. He said, too, that the boat was all right and ready for use."

" And so you cooked them for me," said Bar. " Well, thank you for that, and I must say it looks well on Puff's part. Shall we bring home whatever fish we catch ? "

" Of course," said Mrs. Wood, " and Puff may bring as many pickerel as he pleases. They're always welcome."

They were, indeed, that morning, for it seemed

as if the previous night's disturbance had distributed unusually keen appetites all around the table.

Bar and Val were quite ready to take advantage of Puff's hint about the boat, and George Brayton frankly declared his regret at not being able to go with them.

"Only, Mr. Vernon," he added, "you must not let your fishing prevent you from doing something with your grammar."

"I won't," said Bar, and then even Mrs. Wood became interested in so very unusual a method of attempting the intricacies of the Latin tongue.

At that very hour, however, a brace of active-looking youths were slowly descending the hillside from the cow pastures, and one said to another:

"Hiram Allen, that was very remarkable conduct on the part of Solomon's dun heifer."

"Very," replied Hy; "but, Zeb, don't you suppose they suspect us?"

"Of course they do," said Zeb; "but I've the dun heifer's word of honor that she won't tell how she got into the Academy."

"No, she won't tell," said Hy, thoughtfully,

“but it would be a rough thing on you and me if we got found out.”

“Solomon took care of that with his customary wisdom,” said Zeb; “he came right over to our house and made himself sure that I had been in my peaceful couch all the time.”

“We’d better keep it, even from the boys, unless it’s Bill Jones,” said Hy.

“Of course,” replied Zeb, “the dun heifer, though a brute, is far more trustworthy than any human being.”

Every breakfast-table in Ogleport was busy with the bell mystery that morning, and the unanimity with which all minds seemed in search of a clue which would guide them in the direction of Deacon Fuller’s house was a high testimonial to the well-earned fame of the deacon’s heir.

It was only, however, at the coffee-urn of the Academy principal that anything like gloom interfered with the pervading cheerfulness of tone which the common difficulty seemed to be met.

Euphemia would have been as smiling as a June sunrise about it, and even the doctor would

speedily have recovered from his temporary depression, but Mrs. Dryer failed to discern any ray of comfort.

"It's a piece of outrageous and unparalleled defiance," she assured her husband and step-daughter, for the three-and-thirtieth time. "Your influence and authority in this community will be permanently compromised unless you succeed in probing this matter to the very bottom and bringing the lawless perpetrators to condign justice. Why, Dr. Dryer, that unfortunate heifer might have pulled down the bell."

"I am compelled to admit the possibility of such a termination of her efforts to liberate herself," moodily responded the doctor, unmindful of Effie's suggestion :

"Or to get at the apples."

"The entire operation," he continued, "is enveloped in impenetrable mystery. I am anxious to ascertain if Mr. Brayton has evolved any probable solution. He afterwards ascended to the belfry to remove the rope from its attachments."

"Brayton!" scornfully exclaimed Mrs. Dryer.

"If you don't learn anything till you get it from him! Why, I'm expecting every day to hear that the boys have begun to call him George."

"Dorothy Jane——"

"It's no use, Doctor ; you won't have a cow or a bell or an Academy, or anything else, before the end of this term, if you don't manage somehow to accomplish something."

There was no denying that the exigency was one that called for special exertion, but Effie Dryer had seen George Brayton prying around the Academy building very early that morning, and she would have given more than her step-mother seemed disposed to for a statement of his views concerning the heifer and the bell. It had already been ascertained that the peck measure was the doctor's own, but no one had succeeded in identifying what remained of the green apples.

Meantime, on his way back from his errand of gratitude that morning, Puff Evans had been hailed by Pat Murphy from the door of the grist-mill.

"The top o' the mornin' to yez. It's sorry I am to hear the bad news about yer boat."

"My boat?" responded Puff.

"Yis," said Pat, "and the master towld me to offer yez the pick of his lumber yon, ave ye was minded to build another."

"And what for?" asked Puff. "Isn't the boat a good one?"

"Sure enough," said Pat; "she's only too good for a Rodney lawyer. I hope she'll upset wid him the day he puts his foot in her."

By this time Puff began to comprehend the state of his neighbor's mind on the boat question, and he at once proceeded to an explanation which made the kind-hearted Irishman break out into all sorts of ecomiums upon the "young jintleman from the city."

"It's all right," said Puff.

"Thru for you," said Pat, "an' it's mesilf would like to do the good turn for him. He'll have frinds to the fore in Ogleport, or I'm mistaken."

"'Deed he will," said Puff, very emphatically, for him, "and I'll teach him all there is to learn about boatin' and fishin' in these parts."

"It's yersilf knows it all thin," said Pat, and

he went back to his grist with a muttered :

“ Wondher ave Zeb Fuller and the b’yes know about that same.”

CHAPTER XVII

SKANIGO LAKE

A LITTLE more than a mile from the outermost homes of Ogleport, in a direct line, lay Skanigo Lake.

A beautiful sparkling sheet of water was Skanigo, and it always mixed itself up, somehow, with Puff Evans's ideas of Paradise ; but the Rev. Dr. Solomon Dryer could never forget his great attempt, one December "examination day," to obtain a physical description of it from Zebedee Fuller.

Not, however, because his questions were not fully and accurately answered, somewhat as follows :

"Of what shape is Skanigo Lake, Master Fuller ? "

"Round, sir."

"Round ? "

"Yes, sir ; 'round among the hills, 'way up, as far as it can go."

“Ah, yes. You do not altogether comprehend my interrogatory. But what profundity does it attain? How deep is it?”

“Varies very much, sir.”

“Exactly. An admirable response. But when is it deepest?”

“In July, sir.”

“July?”

“Yes, sir. No depth at all in winter. Bottom freezes hard and gets on top, sir.”

“We will put you in natural philosophy, next term, Master Fuller. But what are the longitudinal and lateral extent—the width and length, I mean, of Skanigo?”

“Has none, sir.”

“No length or width?”

“No, sir. Puff Evans told me he’d caught everything there was in that lake. All his fault, sir.”

The Baptist and Presbyterian ministers came to Dr. Dryer’s assistance at that point, for they were both good fishermen, and Zebedee escaped from the remaining geography of Skanigo.

In that brief ten minutes, however, he had won

the lasting good-will of Euphemia Dryer and the settled enmity of her stepmother.

On the morning after the bell and heifer mystery, no sooner was breakfast over than Bar and Val gathered together their fishing-gear, and were off to make acquaintance with Skanigo for themselves.

The walk was nothing at all, nor was it difficult to find the way to the curiously constructed dwelling of Puff Evans. The land thereabout was the supposed heritage of a non-resident family of "minor heirs," and Puff had settled himself in a little cove with no more trouble of mind about his lack of title than a wild Indian or a Western "squatter."

He did no manner of harm. In fact, he had actually "improved" a few acres, managing to have, as Zeb Fuller said: "The kindest-hearted, best-natured crops in the world; the only potatoes ever heard of that did their own hoeing."

Between his scanty but "good-natured" acres and the liberal bosom of Skanigo, however, Puff succeeded in providing for the natural wants of himself, his very congenial wife, and a swarm of little Puffs, whose only need of clothing, as re-

marked by Zebedee, was to conceal their fins and scales.

"Pity Puff drinks," said Zeb to Gershom Todderley one day. "Sometime he'll make a mistake and bring in those young ones of his, all cleaned, on a string with his other fish. And there won't one of 'em suspect but what it's all right. Good pan-fish they'd make, too."

Bar and Val found Puff down by the water-side, proudly contemplating the very neat proportions and finish of his favorite property.

"It'd ha' just broke my heart to ha' lost that there boat," he said, after exchanging a very enthusiastic greeting with his young visitors. "And now I'd a liked to ha' gone off with ye, but I've made up my mind on somethin' else for to-day, an' I don't see how I kin change it."

"Don't change it on our account," said Bar. "Just tell us where to go, and we'll take care of ourselves."

It would have taken the boys a good month to have followed all the directions that Puff gave them, for he hardly stopped talking until they were out of earshot. Even then he stood knee-deep in the water by the shore, gazing fondly after the

graceful little vessel, as if he half deemed it a breach of faith that he was not on board of her.

"Which way'd we better go, Val?" asked Bar.

"Right up the lake, not far out," said Val. "Then we can drop anchor and fish for perch while you walk into your Latin."

"All right," said Bar.

And all right it was, for the rowing was good fun of itself, and it seemed as if there were new things worth looking at to be seen with every fresh pull at the oars.

"This'll do," said Val, at last. "Puff's put rope enough on this grapnel to anchor anywhere in the lake. He's fond of deep-water fishing. Pulls up right big ones, sometimes—bass, pickerel, and now and then a lake trout. He says the fish are changing. Somebody put thousands and thousands of young ones in a few years ago."

"Rope? I should say he had," remarked Bar. "Did I tell you Mr. Brayton took the bell-rope over to the Doctor's house?"

"Did he?" said Val. "Wonder if he's any idea who did all that, or how it was done."

"I have now," said Bar. "That heifer came in through one of the basement doors."

"Of course," said Val; "but they were all barred on the inside."

"And opened from the inside to let her in. Then it was easy to close 'em all up behind her, fix her horns in the bell-rope and get away."

"But how did they get in or out?"

"I'll show you that, too, when we set our own trap for the bell," said Bar. "I found out when Mr. Brayton and I were going up into the belfry. The rest of them haven't guessed it, unless Mr. Brayton himself has. If he did, he forgot to tell me."

"Our trap?" asked Val. "Are we going to set one?"

"Why, Val," said Bar, "didn't you hear all they had to say yesterday, about our house being haunted?"

"Yes, and Mrs. Wood didn't seem to more'n half like it."

"Well, we can't help that, you know, but I move we send all the ghosts over into the belfry."

"Can you do it?" asked Val, with a look of admiring faith at his wonderful companion.

"Yes," said Bar. "We must take home with us that extra length of anchor-rope. It's small

and strong. Just the thing. Then we must get some bits of wood and a yard or two of canvas, and we can do it."

"Puff Evans has a regular workshop down by his house," said Val. "He's a kind of a genius in his way, if he only knew what work meant."

"Let's fish, then," exclaimed Bar, "and I'll study hard. We shan't have an hour to spare."

It was a curious piece of business, that Latin grammar, lying flat on the seat in front of Bar Vernon, as he sat in the stern of the boat, with his quick eyes glancing from that to the float of his fish-line.

Nevertheless, the pages were turned pretty fast, from time to time, and every now and then a perch or a sunfish would come flopping in over the side of the boat and be promptly transferred to Puff Evans's well-contrived "fish-car," just aft of the centre-board. Val, too, sitting at the prow, was getting very fair luck, only that he would lose some of his best bites in watching Bar and wondering what might be the nature of the trap that he was planning for the benefit of the ghosts and the Academy bell.

“Do you understand what you’re reading?” he asked, at length.

“Of course not,” replied Bar. “It’s all I can do to remember it. Mr. Brayton doesn’t expect me to understand it at one reading. He told me so.”

“I don’t suppose he expects you to remember it, either,” said Val. “It’s a good deal more than I could do.”

“Don’t know about that,” replied Bar. “Once I understand a thing I’m sure to forget it. Never can repeat it in the same words again.”

It was not very clear to Val’s comprehension, even then, but Bar worked and fished away till there came a long interval during which neither of them had so much as a nibble.

“Sun’s getting too high,” said Val. “That’s what Puff told us. No use to fish any more; we’ve a tip-top string, anyhow.”

“Let’s pull back, then,” said Bar. “I’ve got in all the Latin I can hold, for once. Perhaps we can get Puff to help us.”

“If he only knows it isn’t real work,” said Val. “Tell him it’s play and he’ll work his head off.”

The trouble with Puff Evans must have been that he had grown up to be the father of a family without in any manner ceasing to be a boy. There are a good many grown-up people in the same condition, and some of them were not very remarkable boys, either.

On their arrival at the landing, the two friends found Puff waiting for them. He had discerned the return of his treasure at a greater distance than any other man could have made her out, and now he expressed his entire approval of the morning's catch, except that he mildly deprecated the absence of anything like big fish.

"P'r'aps they'll bite better for you when they come to know you," he said encouragingly. "They're a little strange to your way of fishing yet. Are ye goin' right back to th' village?"

"No," said Bar; "we've some fun on hand we want to talk to you about."

Puff was all ears in a moment, and the result of Bar's explanation was that the boys were taken over to the workshop at once, while Mrs. Evans began with intense zeal to broil some fresh fish for their noonday meal.

It speedily came out that Puff had indeed a

sound reason for denying himself that day's sport on the water. The experience of the previous day and the suggestions of Pat Murphy that morning had borne quick fruit in the shape of a commencement on another boat.

"I've named the old one *Mary*," he said, "arter my wife, and I reckon you may name this one."

"When it's built," said Bar. "But it's a wonder you never thought of it before. You can make money at it."

"P'r'aps," said Puff, drily, "but I'd no idea I'd inj'ye it so much as I hev. Might ha' known it, too. I was jest as happy a-buildin' the *Mary*. When a man finds a piece of real work in which he can be just happy, that's the kind of thing God meant him for most likely, and he'd better go ahead and do it, if he can do it honestly."

But Bar and Val were too full of their own ideas to linger very long in looking at Puff's boat, and Bar found his ideas caught up and put into shape with a readiness of perception and a swiftness of execution which altogether surprised him.

"You'll make a perfect job of it," said Bar.
"What do you think it will be worth?"

"Worth?" inquired Puff.

"Yes," said Bar. "What are we to pay you for it?"

"Why," replied Puff, with a darkening brow, "didn't you tell me it was a big joke on Ogleport?"

"Yes," began Bar.

"And ain't I to hev any sheer o' the fun?" asked Puff. "Besides, I'm on hand for anything you two fellers are up to. I owe ye all the good turns in the world. Jest don't you say anythin' more about pay, or you'll spile it all."

"We won't, then," said Bar, for it was easy to see that Puff was beginning to feel hurt; and at that moment Mrs. Evans appeared at the door of the shop to tell them dinner was ready.

So were the boys, for fishing and rowing on Skanigo were fine things for young appetites, and before that meal was over, it became clear that some more fish would have to be caught if they meant to carry anything like a respect-

able string home with them. They did that, however, and they carried something else more than halfway.

CHAPTER XVIII

MAJOR MONTAGUE'S PLANS THWARTED

AT very nearly the hour when Bar Vernon and Val Manning set out for that day's fishing on Skanigo, a big, well-dressed man was standing in the front door of an "east side" hotel in the great city, absorbed, apparently, in some deep and gloomy train of thought.

"Not a trace of him," he muttered. "Oh, what a fool I was to let him go! He never seemed half so valuable before. And then, those papers! Blessings brighten as they take their flight. Gone, completely gone, after keeping my hold on him and them so long. That's what comes of getting too drunk. A fit of pity is sure to follow. Always so with me. Now, as far as I can see, my best hold is on these swells that have taken him in tow. No use trying to bully men like them. They'd only laugh at me. Only show is to sell out to 'em. They'd work it out better'n I could, anyway, seeing I'm debarred so

many privileges; but they shan't do it without letting me in for my share. I feel safe about Bar. He'll never open that thing till the time comes. Queer fellow 'bout some things. Anyhow, I must make my trade before then. I'll go right down to old Danvers's office this very morning and set the wires a-working. Make hay while the sun shines."

A very important decision was that of Major Montague, and it might have had an immediate effect upon the tenor of Bar Vernon's "new time," if he had been permitted to carry it into effect.

Alas for the Major and his plans, however, that sunny morning!

On an opposite corner of the street, at that very moment, a tall, foreign-looking gentleman was leaning over and talking low to a short, broad, keen-eyed man, as he pointed in the direction of the Major.

"That's the chap. You might as well spot him now. May not have another chance. Of course it wouldn't do to have him convicted. He'd squeal too loud. But he must be put out of the way for a while."

"Free board at a public institution for six

months," returned the short man. "Will that do, Prosper?"

"That or thereabouts," replied Prosper; "but he mustn't see me. Go on."

And Prosper drew back and disappeared around the corner; but, in another minute, a hand was laid lightly on Major Montague's arm, and an oddly deferential voice said to him:

"My dear Major, you're wanted."

Pale indeed grew the rosy face of the Major, for he seemed to need no second look to establish the identity of the new arrival.

"Will you come up to my room with me and let me get my things?" he asked, huskily.

"Not just now, thank you," replied the short man, "but I'll send for them and have them brought down to your new hotel for you."

Paler still grew the Major's face, but, although half as large again as the short, broad man, he walked silently and unresistingly away with him.

Why?

Oh, nothing. Only that other man, though none of the best, so far as he himself was concerned, had walked up to Major Montague in the

character of *the law*, and the hand so lightly laid upon the Major's arm had been that of *power*, and all such men as he wilt like dying plants when they are brought into contact with those two things.

Honesty greets the law as a brother, and charity shakes hands with power. Major Montague's hand was shaking, indeed, but not in that way. Before Bar Vernon sat down to his broiled perch at Puff Evans's table, his far-away uncle had been provided with quarters in a "new hotel" that was very old and musty, but from which he would make no calls on Judge Danvers until the Law should say to Power that "bail" had been found, or that other reasons required a further change of boarding-place for the Major.

A strange "hotel" was that, with such strong doors and locks, and such carefully guarded windows. Perfectly "burglar-proof," one would be inclined to think, and yet more burglars and other thieves got into it in the course of a year than into all the other hotels in the great city put together. Only some of them had too little difficulty in getting in and too much in getting out.

Neither Bar Vernon nor any of his friends knew what had become of Major Montague, and perhaps none of them would have cared to ask, unless reminded of him in some way.

Bar himself was too crammed full of the thoughts and things of his "new time" to dwell much just now upon the old or its individual characters.

When he and Val reached home that evening they found that Mrs. Wood had kindly kept a good supper and a mild scolding ready for them, and that George Brayton was also waiting till they should get through with both and come up-stairs.

They made a fair report of their operations on the lake, but did not seem to think the assistant principal of the Academy would be interested in their new mechanical contrivances. At all events, they did not say a word to him about the "trap."

He on his part listened to all that they had to tell with a degree of kindly sympathy which would have won for him the unmeasured contempt of Mrs. Dryer; but the main point of his curiosity, after all, was as to how much Latin had

been captured in the intervals between the "bites."

Here, however, Brayton was destined to be altogether surprised.

"Shall I hear you recite?" he said to Bar. "I can ask you questions as we go along."

Bar handed him the grammar, open at the title page, saying:

"That's where I began," and immediately launched out into a repetition of every word on it.

Brayton listened with an amused and curious air, and turned the leaf as Bar reached the "date of publication" at the bottom.

Next came the preface, and then the introduction, and Bar waded rapidly but almost unerringly through them.

"That'll do," said Brayton. "Have you gone any farther?"

"Yes," said Bar.

"How far?"

"About half a mile, I should say," replied Bar, with the first sign of a smile he had given. "You told me to begin at the beginning."

"And I should say you had," said Brayton.

"It will take you long enough to digest all that. To-morrow you may take up your Greek, and I'll try to make up my own mind how on earth I'd better go to work with yours. You've a good one. The only question is what to do with it."

"That's just what I'd like to know," said Bar. "I've done a good many things with it already, but most of them don't suit me very well."

"We'll talk about it hereafter," said Brayton, thoughtfully. "You and Mr. Manning may go now. I think you have done a good day's work."

So they had, but George Brayton had no notion of what the best part of it—the hardest, at all events—consisted. Neither had it yet been completed, and the boys retired to their own room to give the matter due consideration.

A large, pleasant room it was, at the rear of the house, and one of its windows opened upon the sloping roof of the one-story back-building which old Judge Wood, in his pride, had deemed necessary to complete the proportions of his mansion.

"He must have foreseen our necessities," remarked Bar. "You know, Val, it won't do for

anybody to see us go out or come in. Now there isn't a tree anywhere else within four rods of the house, but that old maple yonder leans clean over the back roof."

"Easy enough to get into that and slide down," said Val. "I guess other boys that have boarded with Mrs. Wood must have done it many a time. I never had this room before."

"We'll start about ten o'clock," said Bar. "It's going to be a pretty dark night. Stars, but no moon till very late. That's just what we want."

"Moonshine enough last night," said Val.

"Well," replied Bar, "wasn't it about midnight? That'll be just when we want it. Now we must do some studying, or I must, and then we'll go to bed for awhile."

Val hardly knew what to make of a fellow who could pick up a Latin grammar and go to work so doggedly under such circumstances.

He could not have done it, to save his life, but he managed to get fairly interested in "Ivanhoe" while Bar was studying.

Neither of the city boys had given a moment's thought that day, as to the notions formed of

them by the young gentlemen of the village, important as they were likely to find that very thing.

They might, indeed, have been surprised if they had known how very thoroughly they had been discussed, or how largely their arrival entered into the current plans and calculations of Zebedee Fuller and his friends.

"Now, Zeb," said Hy Allen, as they sat on the log by the mill-dam after taking their accustomed swim, "we all know Val Manning well enough, and he wasn't so very hard to manage."

"Young aristocrat," growled Zeb. "Thinks he's a mile and a half above us Ogleport boys. And this new chap that's come along with him, he's ten times worse than Val. They're boarding at Ma'am Wood's, you know, and so's Brayton. He'll take 'em right in charge, and they'll get in on everything ahead of us. Tell you what, boys, those fellows have got to have a setting down. Here they've bought the best boat on all Skanigo first day they got here."

Perhaps, if the truth were told, Zeb's jealousy was very much less on account of the boat, or good clothes, or even "citified ways," after all,

than because the objects of his dislikes were domiciled with George Brayton.

Somehow or other, Zeb had acquired a feeling of "ownership" for the new teacher, and was very much disposed to resent what looked like an invasion of his vested rights.

"There's only two of 'em," vaguely suggested Bill Jones.

"Don't know how many are coming," replied Zeb. "I move we take proper measures for the subjugation of these two before the rest get here."

"I'm in for that!" exclaimed Hy Allen, whose somewhat pugnacious cast of features indicated very faithfully the character of their owner.

Hy was half a head taller than Zeb Fuller, and decidedly his superior, physically, only such a thing as a quarrel, or even a test of strength with his "chieftain" had probably never occurred to him.

The subject of the "new boys" had been coming up again and again all day, and had gone far towards neutralizing the happiness which the bell and heifer mystery might otherwise have supplied.

It was now, however, becoming threadbare and distasteful, for the time, and the council at the mill-dam slowly broke up and dispersed, even Zeb Fuller's nearest friends finding some other errand, so that he was all alone when he met the Rev. Dr. Dryer as he walked up the street towards his father's house.

"Looks as if the indelicate conduct of the dun heifer weighed on his spirits," soliloquized Zeb. "No, I'll not give Solomon an excuse for saying I avoid him. Good-evening, Dr. Dryer."

Zeb's face had nearly recovered from the effects of his combat with the Rodney vagabonds, but it was not at any time specially adapted to the look of dignified benevolence he now tried to make it assume.

Dr. Dryer, at sight of Zeb Fuller, had been taken possession of by one idea, however, and he failed to appreciate the effort.

"Zebedee," he exclaimed, with deep solemnity of manner, "how did that cow get into the Academy?"

"Not a single long word," thought Zeb, "and that's bad for Solomon." He, however, answered promptly :

"Dr. Dryer, that matter troubles me. There's something supernatural about it."

"Supernatural?"

"Ghostly!" said Zeb. "This village is going to the bad."

"Zebedee!" exclaimed the Doctor. "Are you so lost as that? Do you believe in ghosts?"

"Firmly," responded Zeb. "Ogleport is getting full of them. I don't know what we shall do when Mrs. Wood's lot get back again for the winter."

"I must see your father about this," said the Doctor, with an ominous wag of his head.

"Do, please," replied Zeb; "I don't know what's to become of Mr. Brayton, who seems a deserving young man, or those poor boys from the city."

The Doctor gazed very hard at Zeb through his spectacles, and half wished that he had his wife with him; but the youth said something about his own cows to the effect that he hoped the ghosts would let them alone, and marched steadily away up the street.

"Remarkable!" exclaimed the Doctor. "Superstition assailing the uneducated intellect of

even this favored generation. This must be looked to. I wonder what Mrs. Dryer will say now ? ”

He wondered less an hour or so later, when he consulted his beloved Dorothy Jane in the presence of Euphemia.

“ Father,” said Zeb to the deacon, when he came back from the cow pasture, “ if old Sol comes to consult you about supernatural noises and appearances at the Academy, I wish you would humor him a little.”

“ Zebedee, what’s up now ? ”

“ Hard to tell,” said Zeb. “ Old Sol seems unable to comprehend how that bell managed to rope in his dun heifer.”

“ I don’t wonder,” replied the deacon, with a very sharp look at his heir ; but he and Mrs. Fuller had been talking the matter over, and had decided not to press Zeb too closely about it.

“ I’m doing all I can for this village,” said Zeb to himself, that night, “ but I fear an increase of activity will shortly be demanded.”

CHAPTER XIX

A NOCTURNAL ESCAPE

THE village of Ogleport was satisfactorily quiet, and as dark as the occasion called for, when Bar Vernon and Val Manning, with their shoes fastened to their waistbands, crept noiselessly out on the back roof.

There was not the least difficulty in getting into the branches of the maple, or from them to the ground below.

Then the shoes were hurriedly put on, and the two boys were off through the garden, down to the river bank, and from thence it was easy enough to gain one of the lower crossroads without being seen.

Half a mile of brisk walking in the direction of the lake brought them to the clump of bushes where they had hidden the joint product of their own skill and that of Puff Evans.

A curious thing it was.

A sort of "van" or wing about three feet

square, made of a wooden frame with cotton cloth stretched across it, and one side of the frame swung easily in a pair of "journal holes" bored in another and stronger frame.

Below the wing, at right angles to the outside frame, a sort of arm reached down about two inches.

"I don't see how you'll make it work," said Val, "but I suppose you do."

"Show you when we get there," said Bar. "Now we must make for the sheds."

By the time the two boys reached the rear of the Academy there was not a soul stirring in all Ogleport.

Even Dr. Dryer felt safe about the bell, now that the rope had been removed, and he had looked to the doors and windows for himself, that afternoon.

"Are you a good climber, Val?" asked Bar.

"Not very."

"Then I'll let you in through that side-door in the basement," said Bar. "You keep the machine."

"But how'll you get in?"

"Lightning-rod," replied Bar. "It goes up

close by one of the second story windows, and that has no fastening."

"Is it strong enough?"

"Plenty. That's the way the village boys got in. One of 'em left the mark of his heel deep in the grass at the bottom. Must have slipped and come down hard."

"You're a detective!" said Val.

It would have done the heart of Zeb Fuller good, if it had not revolutionized his views concerning "those two boarders," if he had seen the practiced skill and agility with which Bar Vernon went up that lightning-rod.

"It's equal to his billiards," thought Val.

Yes, and it had been learned very much in the same way, during some of the queer episodes of his "old time."

The window was opened and Bar disappeared, shutting it carefully and silently behind him, while Val hurried around to the basement door.

That, too, was speedily unbarred, and Val and his machine admitted.

"What are you barring it behind us for?" asked Val.

"Don't want any accidents," Bar began, and

then he added, "Hush, we're not inside here a minute too soon."

Indeed they were not, for one of the Academy trustees, unable to be easy in his mind over the events of the previous night, had come out for a scouting expedition of his own.

Slowly, with heavy and circumspect tread, the good citizen was making his rounds of the old edifice, and now he carefully tried the fastenings of that lower door and peered anxiously in through the curtainless windows.

Very still kept the two adventurers, and both felt an unusually active pumping at their hearts, until they were sure that every door and window within his reach had been examined by the careful trustee, and that he had taken his satisfied departure.

"Now, Val," said Bar, "we're safe enough. Come on."

Up they went, first into the main hall, then into the second story, then up the creaking and short-turning flight of steps which led to the lower deck of the steeple bell-tower.

"This west window," said Bar, "towards the roof, is just the thing for our windmill. The

wind has a clean sweep across the deck, for there isn't a bit of sash all around."

"There used to be, in winter," said Val, "but I s'pose they think this deck is roof enough."

"So it is," said Bar, as he worked steadily and rapidly away, "but nobody can see this west window from the ground, unless they get over into the graveyard back of the sheds."

"I don't understand it quite yet," said Val. "Even if the wind works it, how'll it ring the bell?"

"Why," replied Bar, "up there, on one side of the bell, is an old pulley-wheel. I'll have to oil it before it will run well. Now, I'll hitch the end of this rope to the bell-hammer, and pass it over that wheel. It'll come down at the east side, close to the timbers, where nobody can see it with a telescope. Then I'll pass it under this wheel here and hitch it to the lower arm of our van. Then, if there comes a good wind, that bell's bound to toll every time the van is blown in."

"It would take a west wind for it," said Val.

"Perhaps, to work it regularly," replied Bar,

"but 'most any wind may do some good. Now, I've a pokerish job before me."

It looked like it, indeed!

Val Manning was brave enough, but he would hardly have liked to undertake that climb in the dark. Not every boy would have cared for it in broad daylight.

Up went Bar, however, as surely and as rapidly as if he had served an apprenticeship at sea, and Val waited for him in almost breathless expectation till he saw him once more emerge into the moonlight, which was now beginning to stream through the bell-tower.

"It'll work," said Bar, "but I came pretty near losing my hold once. That would have been a bad piece of business."

"Killed you!" exclaimed Val.

"Maybe not," said Bar. "I fell as far as that once, but I came down on my feet. Made me lame for a month."

Val made up his mind that he would know more about his chum's adventures some day, but just now there was too much work on hand for any further talking.

Bar's mechanical genius had not been alto-

gether neglected, although he did not know anything of "book" mathematics, and in half an hour more he was able to show Val how that van would be sure to make a good pull on the rope if the wind would only do its share of the work.

"Glad there's none blowing now," said Val.

"There will be, before long," said Bar; "there was a halo round the moon last night. Now we must manage to get back to bed again without being seen. Nobody'll suspect new boys like us, anyhow."

"But won't they be after poor Zeb Fuller!" exclaimed Val.

"I must get acquainted with that fellow," replied Bar.

"He'll take care of that," said Val. "They're going to play ball on the green to-morrow, and we can take a look at him then. Only we're sure to get into some kind of a muss."

"The sooner the better, then," said Bar. "We can't settle matters with a crowd like his a day too soon."

"We'd better go home around by the river, anyhow," said Val.

The process of getting out of the building was a good deal like that of getting in, for Bar would not listen to Val's proposition to slide down the lightning-rod.

"Not," he said, "till you've had some sort of practice first. It isn't so safe and easy as it looks, and you mustn't run any unnecessary risk."

"But you do," said Val.

"No, it isn't any kind of risk for me," replied Bar, "so long as the rod's strong enough to hold me."

Once more on solid ground, outside the building, Bar insisted on the greatest watchfulness and caution in working their way around and back to the bank of the little river. There, at least, they fancied themselves safe, and were pushing along from one lot to another, for the fences were no sort of obstacle, although they were built close down to the water.

As they sprang over into one inclosure, however, they were greeted by a hoarse, deep, threatening growl, which brought them to an immediate stand, and there before them, in the moonlight, they discerned the forms of a well-grown boy and a dog who was only too "well-grown."

"It's Zeb Fuller and his Bob," exclaimed Val. "We're in his father's lot. Zebedee," he added, "what are you doing out here at this time of night?"

"Set some night-lines for eels," said Zebedee, "and my mind was troubled about them. But what are you out for? Don't you see what an awful example you're setting Bob and me?"

"We?" said Val. "Oh, we are taking a look at the village."

"Yes," said Zeb. "I must go and talk with Solomon about it to-morrow. Have you tried your new boat yet, Mr. Cash?"

"Vernon," said Val. "Bar Vernon. He's to be my chum this winter."

"Had a good time in her to-day," said Bar. "Good boat."

"Yes," replied Zebedee, "and it was Puff Evans's bad luck that the cow tolled the bell for last night."

"Oh," said Bar, "don't you and the cow worry about Puff Evans. He's satisfied. If you don't believe it you can ask him."

"I'll ask him," said Zeb, with more surliness than usually belonged to his nature, but he did

not like the looks of things at all. Just then, however, the line he was pulling in gave unmistakable tokens of having something on it, and the next moment he had not only one eel, but two of them, and large ones, wriggling on the bank.

"That makes six for to-night," he remarked, as Bob furtively tried one of the slimy prizes with his paw. "Fond of eels, Cash?"

"Very," said Bar; "I owned an eel-mill once. Show you how to make one, sometime. Come on, Val. That's a very dissipated-looking dog."

While they were talking, Bar and Val had quietly walked along till they were halfway across the lot, and Bob had apparently recognized them as "boys," for whom, as such, all fences and the like were constitutionally free, for he had not repeated his note of warning.

Even Zeb Fuller was for once a little taken aback.

He had his own reasons for not wishing to make a disturbance at that place and time, but he gazed half-angrily after the two friends as they vaulted over into the next inclosure.

"Dissipated? Bob, was there ever impudence like that? These fellows'll get more in-

structions than old Sol can give them before they're many days older. Robert, my boy, did you hear what they said about you?"

Bob was pawing the eels with a very discontented sort of whine, and did not take up the insult with any spirit.

"They said you had a dissipated look, Robert. Well, so you have, and I mustn't keep you out so late o' nights any more. But won't I get even with that pair before I'm done with 'em!"

Zeb Fuller had very plainly had his own way too much in Ogleport, and his rustic narrowness had got him into a very bad state of mind. In fact, he and his friends had too much accustomed themselves, in a thoroughly Saxonish way, to regard the entire race of Academy "boarders" as a very undesirable lot of "foreigners," if not, also, as a kind of "invaders," to whom small mercy belonged on the part of himself and the other "natives."

CHAPTER XX

THE BOXING MATCH

THE rest of that night was reasonably calm, and Bar and Val slept soundly, without any fear of trouble in the belfry, nor did they fail to promptly answer the bell for breakfast.

After that, a trip to the lake, a look at Puff Evans and his workshop, and a few hours of fishing, followed, as a matter of course, only Bar Vernon discovered that he was not going to go through the Greek grammar "across lots," as he had begun to do with the Latin.

They found Puff rapidly becoming absorbed and enthusiastic about his new boat.

"I'll hev to go over to old Todderley's after some more lumber to-morrow," he said; "but 'pears like I can't bear to leave it for a moment."

"Isn't there some danger that old Skinner might get wind of it and try to take it away from you?" suggested Bar.

The boat-builder blew out his flabby cheeks with a most mournful puff, and the saw he was using dropped from his hand.

"Then, what on 'arth *is* the use?" he exclaimed, as if all the beauty and glory had suddenly been knocked out of his life.

"I was thinking of that last night," said Bar. "I'll write out a bill of sale for the boat, when I get home. Call it mine till it's sold. I'll swap you the *Mary* for it, now, if you want."

"Ain't that there a leetle crooked?" slowly responded Puff.

"Yes, a little," said Bar. "He means to steal the boat and we mean to hide it, that's all. Send him to me if he troubles you and I'll fix him. You needn't be afraid, though. He won't dream of coming."

"I don't mind doing that," said Puff. "Reckon I kin go to work agin now. Hope you'll have a right good day's fishin'."

So they did, so far as it went, but the boys had made up their minds to be on the green in time to take a look at the game of baseball as well as at the boys who came to play it.

On their return home they found that George

Brayton had gone for an afternoon drive, and that Mrs. Wood was inclined to scold a little at their being so late for their dinner.

"Never mind her, Bar," said Val, when she was out of hearing.

"I don't," said Bar; "but I'll kill some of her ghosts for her if she isn't good to me."

"It's clearing up a little," replied Val. "The ghosts may be heard from sooner than people think."

By the time the boys came out again the usually deserted green began to put on a somewhat lively appearance.

The two friends had hardly supposed Ogleport could turn out so many "young men" of all ages, from twenty years down, and Val declared that several of the older ones were "boarders," like themselves, while others had come in from the surrounding farms and were there by accident.

Bar noticed, however, that the one "pervading spirit," busiest and most controlling, but without being either talkative or meddlesome, was that odd chap, Zeb Fuller.

"Has something on his mind to-day, or I'm

mistaken," he remarked to Val. "I never saw just such another. Was he the fellow that thrashed you last term?"

"Yes," said Val; "he once and that big fellow there another time. That's Hy Allen, and he's a sort of bully of the Academy."

"Then, Val, my boy," said Bar, "I'm afraid those two have made up their minds to try it again."

"Had we better keep away?"

"By no manner of means," said Bar; "only you must promise me one thing."

"What's that?"

"Let me give 'em their first lesson, if they're bound to have one. You're enough for either of them, now, I think, but I want to take the conceit out of them in a way of my own."

"Well," said Val, "all right; only I don't mean to be counted out."

"Wait and see," said Bar.

Nearer and nearer the two friends were strolling, as they had a perfect right, to the spot where the preliminaries of the game were being arranged, when they were suddenly greeted with these words from Hy Allen:

"Hullo! you fellows, are you going to play?"

"Not this time," said Bar, quietly; "we prefer to look on."

"You prefer to look on?" very mockingly responded Zeb Fuller himself, for there was a good deal in Bar Vernon's manner that he had made up his mind not to like. "If you're above playing ball with us, what are you here for?"

"Oh," said Bar, "you may play. We don't want the green for anything to-day. Go on with your game."

There were enough boys among the bystanders who were glad to hear Zeb Fuller answered in his own peculiar way, and the laugh that followed was not a feeble one.

"We may play, may we?" began Zeb, but just then a peculiarly mocking and jeering laugh sounded in his very ears, and he wheeled around with:

"Hy Allen!"

But Hiram was also seeking for the source of a very similar insult, and it seemed to Bill Jones as if some one behind him asked him for his head.

"Play football, you know," added the insulting stranger.

"Look here, boys," said Zeb, "this looks like a conspiracy."

"It's a ghost," seemed to come from the open mouth of Hiram.

"Don't be a fool, Hy," said Zeb; "all the ghosts are at Mrs. Wood's. Have you seen any?" he asked, turning again to the chums.

"Saw one last night," said Val, "down by the river, catching eels."

"Look here, you fellows," again began Hy Allen, when the derisive laugh once more interrupted him. It was not a loud one, but it was extremely tantalizing, and the Academy "bully" looked angrily but vainly around for the source of it.

"Why don't you go on with your game?" asked Bar. "Didn't you hear me say you might? Even if you don't know how, you're old enough to learn."

Exasperatingly polite was Bar. Zeb Fuller himself, at his very best, could not have been more so, and again there was a laugh at Zeb's expense from among the outsiders. Zeb was

altogether too popular with his own set, and they had carried things with too high a hand not to have stirred up jealousies against them. As for Hy Allen, there were a dozen of boys, at least, on that green who had felt the weight of his hand at one time or another. It was evident to all the onlookers, as far as appearances went, that neither Bar nor Val had the shadow of a chance in any physical encounter with Hy, and not much more with Zeb Fuller or Bill Jones, but all the more for that there was a strong feeling of admiration for the cool self-possession of the two strangers. Even their somewhat fashionable, citified dress was halfway forgiven them.

“Game!” exclaimed Hy Allen, as angry as if he had received some genuine injury. “This is our green. I’ll teach you a game, one you won’t forget right away.”

“Give ’em a chance, Hy,” exclaimed Zeb Fuller. “You two, Val Manning and Cash—Bar whatever your name is—go home now and keep your clothes clean. Tell him what a licking you got last time, Val.”

“He has,” said Bar, “and he liked it so

well, I thought I'd come over and get one like it."

Again the mocking laugh chuckled in Hy Allen's ears.

Bar Vernon was scarcely six paces distant now, with that polite, deferential smile of his, and as Hiram turned again to get a look at his tormentor, Zeb Fuller's long bottled-up temper got the better, or the worse, of him, and made a sudden rush, as if to grapple with Bar.

"Hold him, Val!" shouted Bar, and Val was almost as much surprised as Zeb himself to find that young genius whirled backward into his arms, so that he had only to pin him and hurl him flat upon the grass.

Hy Allen had followed his friend almost instantly, and so had Bill Jones, and the "rush" of the former might have had danger in it, he was so big and strong, but he seemed to catch his foot in something, as Bar dodged under his arm, and the next thing he knew, as he lay prone on the grass, Bill Jones came tumbling over him with a very unpleasant-looking nose.

The first impulse of the other boys of Zeb Fuller's set had been to "follow their leader,"

but not one of them had the remotest conception of such a thing as the art of boxing, and four or five of them, one after another, went down like so many nine-pins.

It really seemed as if Bar Vernon had hardly made an effort, until, as Hy Allen struggled to his feet, there was a sudden bound forward, a cracking "spat" as if something hard hit something else pretty hard, and the redoubtable Hiram was down again.

Poor Zeb, too, had just such another experience with his own antagonist, and it is greatly to be feared that Val Manning made things about even for that "last term's licking."

"You'll all be perfectly safe," remarked Bar, "if you'll only lie still when you're down."

"What's this? What does all this mean?" suddenly exclaimed an excited voice behind him, and Bar turned to find himself in no less a presence than that of the Rev. Dr. Solomon Dryer.

"What does this mean, sir?" again demanded the Doctor, and Zebedee Fuller remarked to himself:

"Not a single long word! That looks very bad."

But Bar Vernon calmly and politely touched his hat, saying:

"Lessons in boxing, Dr. Dryer. Are they contrary to the rules of the Academy?"

"He's a trump, anyway!" said Zeb to himself. "I couldn't have beat that."

"Boxing lessons?" said the Doctor, incredulously. "What are those boys doing on the grass?"

"Get up, boys," shouted Bar.

Several were already so doing, but Hy Allen was the last to resume his perpendicular, for his blow and fall had been of an unusually heavy kind.

Never in all his life, however, had Zeb Fuller learned so much in so short a time, and never did he "come to the front" so very ably.

"None of us knew anything about boxing, Dr. Dryer," he said, very gravely. "If I'd have had such a lesson a few weeks ago, I'd never have had so hard a time with those Rodney fellows that stole your cows. I hope sincerely you won't think of forbidding it."

Poor Bill Jones was wiping his bloody nose at the moment, and the Doctor exclaimed :

“Do you not observe that cruel and disgusting spectacle ? You, sir ; what’s your name ?”

“Vernon, sir. Barnaby Vernon,” responded our hero. “I’m very sorry I had no gloves on, sir.”

“Vernon ? Ah, indeed. I see now. Mr. Manning, is that you ? I am astonished beyond measure ! And this is the young gentleman, your father’s ward, concerning whom he sent me a written communication. I will see you both again about this business. In the meantime let us have no more boxing lessons. I felt almost sure you were all fighting.”

“Fighting ! Indeed !” exclaimed Zebedee Fuller. “Why, Doctor, do you suppose all Ogleport would assail, with one accord, two innocent and unoffending strangers ?”

“Zebedee,” replied the Doctor, “I should be rather inclined to the opinion that the two unoffending strangers had been administering wholesome admonition to a part, at least, of the population of Ogleport.”

With that, the Doctor turned upon his heel

and strode away, but Zebedee walked up to Bar Vernon and held out his hand, remarking:

"Solomon is right, for once. If ever a man like him can acquire wisdom, I should be ashamed of myself to exhibit a lower order of intelligence. I have no longer the least disposition to give you a thrashing."

"Nor I either," said Bill Jones.

Hy Allen was a little slower, but in a moment more he came in with:

"Zeb, ask him how he does it. I own up. It beats me."

As for the other boys, none of them had suffered more than a sharp and sudden upset, with a "contusion" or so, as a surgeon would have described it, and they were quite willing to join their comrades in calling it a drawn battle.

"That is," explained Zeb Fuller, "our side's drawn out. And now I hope we'll be able to make it all right with old Sol. Mr. Vernon, it would delight me exceedingly if you would persuade Solomon to let you give him a boxing lesson and allow me to be personally present as spectator."

CHAPTER XXI

GEORGE BRAYTON'S DRIVE

GEORGE BRAYTON had been guilty of the most natural thing in the world that afternoon. He had spent the whole morning among his books, retorts, air-pumps, and other matters, over at the Academy building, and he desired something else for a change.

That was his first visit to Ogleport, but, although well aware that there was plenty of fine scenery in the neighborhood, he had thus far made no further acquaintance with it than he had gained from the stage, as he was pulled through the clouds of dust on the north road the day of his arrival.

The young "assistant" had therefore deliberately planned a sort of tour of investigation behind a fast horse, and he meant to have a good many more of the sort. In fact, he had entered into a commercial treaty with the one livery stable of Ogleport, down at Runner's Tavern, to

supply him from time to time with all the fast horses that he might need.

So far, so good, but how can a young man enjoy fine scenery with no companion but a horse?

Not very well, indeed, and, besides all that, there was nothing selfish about George Brayton, and he had instantly determined to share his first drive with merry Effie Dryer.

He forgot, truly, to ask Effie's stepmother for her permission, and had impudently driven up to the Doctor's house after dinner, and proposed to wait until Miss Euphemia should complete any necessary preliminaries.

And Euphemia?

Dear little soul! She never once thought of refusing, nor did she waste any great amount of time over her simple toilet, but was ready with a promptness which went to George's very heart, as anything so rare as that is quite likely to.

And Mrs. Dryer sat with Brayton in the parlor, during those few minutes, and smiled on him in a way that showed to perfection the art-work of her dentist, but which did not disclose an atom of the gall and wormwood with which

her heart had been stirred up when she saw him hitch his horse in front of the gate.

It is barely possible that Effie knew more about it than Brayton, or why should she have manœuvred with such graceful swiftness and such entire success to get into the parlor first?

By the time Mrs. Dryer came, also, Effie had accepted the invitation to drive and "gone for her things," although, as the former smilingly explained to George, "the Dorcas Society was to meet that afternoon, and Euphemia would be very much missed."

And he had calmly replied,

"I should think likely she might. I never saw a young lady who seemed to be more of a general favorite. She's a kind of sunbeam."

"How poetical you are!" exclaimed Mrs. Dryer. "I see you have one of Mr. Runner's horses. A bad sort of a man, they say."

"Good judge of horses, though," replied George. "It's a pity so many good men don't seem to know what a horse is."

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. Dryer, "but there's always seemed to me to be a great deal of wickedness about horses."

"There she comes," was Brayton's next remark, and it referred to the rustle of Effie's dress on the stairs, not to any preposterous action on the part of Runner's fast mare at the gate.

Now it happened that George Brayton had been a lover of horses from his youth up, and many a pleasant hour and mile he had passed behind his four-footed favorites, but his memory failed to bring him up the ghost of a more enjoyable drive than he took that afternoon.

Such a guide was Effie Dryer!

She knew just where to go, and her "driver" turned into highways and byways, most submissively, at her slightest bidding.

What surprised George most of all, however, was to find how very much of womanly common sense and genuine intelligence lay hidden beneath Effie's unfailing flow of high spirits.

Her smile did not in the least degree resemble the ready "lip service" of her stepmother, and it could give place in a moment to a very serious and earnest sort of meaning, and George Brayton caught himself, before long, suggesting subjects of talk and turning over one idea after another, for no better reason than simply to watch

the shadows chase the sunshine on Euphemia Dryer's face.

A very dangerous sort of amusement for a young man to indulge in. At all events, when the drive had lasted longer than the sober-minded Mrs. Dryer would have at all approved—the very thought of it had soured the Dorcas Society for her all that afternoon—George Brayton delivered Effie at her father's door, took back the fast mare to Runner's stable, and then walked up the main street of Ogleport with an idea that it was in every way a pleasanter sort of village than he had hitherto imagined.

He reached the green just as the boys—an unusually large crowd of them—were winding up a tremendous game of baseball.

"Been a tough one, I should say," remarked George to himself. "Looks as if every fourth boy had tried to catch the ball in his mouth and got it on his nose. I begin to wonder how Zeb Fuller would look without a black eye. Bar and Val, though, seem to have escaped. I must put Bar through his Greek to-night. He can't have fished to-day quite long enough to learn the grammar by heart. He's a remarkable boy."

If Brayton had been within hearing just after the Rev. Dr. Solomon Dryer left the green that afternoon, his admiration might have been transferred to Zebedee Fuller himself, for that cautious youth had followed up his magnanimous surrender by saying :

"Look here, boys. We've had our boxing-lesson, but it won't do now not to do up our baseball. Old Sol mustn't be allowed a peg to hang his hat on. Our young friends from the prize-ring will comprehend the situation."

"If you mean Val and me," said Bar, laughing, "we're ready."

But that game of ball !

Never had Ogleport witnessed anything so curiously bewildering since the Indian braves finished their own last "match game" and carried their clubs away with them.

The ball was here, there, everywhere. Ins and outs found themselves mysteriously mixed up. No fellow could tell who it was that started him wrong.

There was really no redeeming feature to the whole matter, except Bar Vernon's marvelous pitching and batting.

"Hiram Allen!" exclaimed Zeb to his lieutenant, "that fellow is a treasure to the Academy. We can play the Rodney nine now, and beat them all to flinders. How does your poor old nose feel, my boy?"

"Beat 'em? Yes," replied Hy; "but see where he's sent the ball. My nose feels like a mashed potato. Zeb, we must get him to teach us how, and then we can whale all Rodney."

"And all Rodney stands in moral need of chastisement," responded Zeb. "I must consult the deacons about it, first one I meet. Are you sure which side you are on, Hiram?"

"Not exactly," growled Hiram, "but Bar Vernon's on the winning side, whichever it is."

"That's it," said Zeb. "I don't propose to have any more personal collisions with Mr. Vernon. He is a very excellent young man."

But the game of ball, with all its manifold perplexities, was played out at last, and Zebedee was expressing his satisfaction at the result to Bar and Val, when his left eye caught a glimpse of George Brayton coming up the street, and he remarked as much.

"Then," said Bar, "I must go home and have my Greek lesson."

"Greek?" exclaimed Zeb. "Is not that one of the ancient tongues?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so," said Bar. "I looked into it for the first time to-day."

"Give me your hand," said Zeb, enthusiastically. "I'm proud to meet a man of your age who can say that. But do you really mean to study it this time?"

"Of course. That's what I came here for—Greek and the rest of it."

"Then so will I," said Zeb. "I have striven for years to stir up old Sol and myself on the Greek question, but have failed."

A mournful failure it had been, although Zeb had not been a bad scholar in some other branches. He had studied, in fact, as most boys do under teachers like Dr. Dryer, very much as it had pleased him.

As a general thing it does not please them to do much hard work in Greek, and so they end by knowing even less about it than do their "instructors," to put it very strongly.

Bar and Val were off now to join Brayton,

and in a few minutes more the latter had begun to forget his pleasant "drive" in his curiosity over the results of Bar's first attempt at the grand old language.

It was little more than very successful "memorizing," of course, but Brayton saw that a good deal could be done with a memory like that, and he was especially delighted at having so promising a pupil.

He was not yet so experienced or so enthusiastic a teacher as to have rejoiced over the acquisition of a "dull boy."

No teacher is a thoroughly good one till he reaches that point.

When he gets to it, however, he is safe to enjoy himself for the remainder of his life, for the supply of dull boys is as sure as frost in November.

"Pretty tough game of ball you boys had to-day," said Brayton, after the lesson was over.

"Good game," said Val. "Bar plays like a professional."

"Is that the way so many of them got battered?" asked Brayton.

"No, sir," said Val; "they got that in the boxing lesson."

"Boxing lesson?" exclaimed Brayton. "Why didn't you use gloves?"

"They were in too much of a hurry for that," replied Bar. "In fact, Dr. Dryer seemed to disapprove of it. He came out and stopped us before it was finished."

"Hum! Yes. I think I see how it was," said Brayton. "You'd better wear gloves next time, Bar. You've knocked quite a piece of skin off your left hand."

"That?" said Bar. "Oh, Hy Allen ran his head against it. He has a very hard head."

Brayton took Bar's injured hand and deliberately felt of his arm, muttering to himself:

"Hard as iron. How came he ever to get into such training as that at his age? Something very unusual," and then he added aloud: "I think I'll get you to help me keep the peace this term. Hy Allen won't want to try that again very soon, and I think the rest will agree with him."

If Brayton had but known it, Zeb Fuller and his friends were "agreeing" to that very thing at that moment, as they gathered in council

around the log at the mill-dam. Their coming determination was expressed in the words of Bill Jones.

“Tell ye what, fellers, we shan’t feel sure about them city chaps till we’ve had ’em down here for a swim. We didn’t let ’em come last term, you know.”

“That’s true,” replied Zeb Fuller. “It’s our duty to see they keep themselves clean. Oh, if I could but persuade Solomon to soak in the pond for a while at the bottom of it!”

CHAPTER XXII

GHOSTS IN THE ACADEMY BELFRY

THERE was one man who had never been able to get Bar Vernon fairly out of his head since the first day he saw him, and that man was old Judge Danvers.

Not but that the busy lawyer had plenty of other things to occupy him, but there was something in Bar and his mysterious "old time" which was well calculated to excite the curiosity of one whose whole life had been spent in solving "riddles" of one kind or another.

"That black valise," he said to himself. "I admire Bar's honesty about it, and of course he must keep his word, but I'm under no such bond. I think I must manage to get hold of that Major Montague. He'll be a hard one to find, if he chooses to keep out of the way. Sorry Dr. Manning didn't temporize with him a little. I doubt if he will come near my office again.

There's something about the premises that doesn't suit his fancy."

Major Montague had reasons of his own for not fancying anything which reminded him of the law, but just now, as we have seen, he would have been meeting the wishes of Judge Danvers a good deal more than halfway if it had not been for insurmountable difficulties.

The old lawyer was in quite a "brown study" over what might or might not be the best way to find the Major, when his office-boy brought him in a card, and with it a note of introduction.

"Ashbel Norton!" said the Judge, as he glanced at the card and then opened the note. "Ah, an Englishman. Brown Brothers, bankers. Introduction enough for any man. Show the gentleman in."

A very English-looking person, indeed, with light hair and whiskers, and it seemed to the judge that he very much resembled somebody he knew, though he could not say whom.

The usual formalities of such a call were rapidly completed, for, as the banker's introduction had stated, the stranger required the old lawyer's professional advice and services.

“Very curious case, indeed,” he said, as he laid a bundle of papers on the table. “Involves family secrets—very unpleasant things, you know. Not the affair I’d intrust to any ordinary man, I assure you. There’s really a good deal at stake, my dear sir.”

The Judge dryly professed his readiness to pay attention, although he could not, somehow, prevent his thoughts even then from wandering to Bar Vernon and Major Montague.

Whether or not the stranger was favorably impressed with the manner of his “counsel,” he promptly began to open his budget, accompanying the action with such verbal explanations as seemed to be required.

It was a strange story, though Judge Danvers had heard others somewhat resembling it, and before long he found himself taking a deeper and deeper interest, and Mr. Norton expressed himself surprised, in their subsequent conversation, at finding how thoroughly the lawyer had made himself acquainted with the outlines of his case.

“The first thing to be done,” remarked the Judge, “is to set the detectives on the track of all these items of information. They are very

slender as yet. Mere hints. That will take time."

"Of course," replied Mr. Norton, "I expect that. Am ready to spend as much time, and money, too, as may be necessary. I am quite at your service."

"Then take a trip of a week to Niagara, or any other place where you can enjoy yourself, and by the time you return I will be ready to report what I have discovered."

"Can I not aid you in your proposed search?"

"After that," replied the Judge. "Is not this your first visit to America?"

"It is, indeed," said Mr. Norton.

"Then try to make the most of it," said Judge Danvers. "There's no telling where you may have to travel before we get through."

Mr. Ashbel Norton was apparently a gentleman accustomed to having his own way, but he was old enough to know there was little to be gained in a dispute with a lawyer, and so, after answering a legion of what seemed to him unimportant questions, he bowed himself out, promising to return at the end of the week.

"Very curious affair," growled Judge Danvers,

after his new client had departed. "Now I've two family mysteries on my hands—one from England, and one from I don't know where. Well, I'll set the wires a-working on this one, but, for all that, I won't neglect the other. I must find that rascal, Montague, and then I must write to Barnaby. No, not that, I must go to see him; but I'd like to find the Major first."

A busy head was that of the old lawyer that afternoon and evening, what with one case and another; but not one whit more active than had been the brains of the two youngsters, away up there in Ogleport.

At the supper table Brayton remarked to Mrs. Wood:

"The sun went down in a great pile of clouds. Looks very much as if a storm were brewing."

"'Bout time for one," replied the landlady. "I kind o' feel it in my bones. Not that I'm at all superstitious, only maybe it's rheumatism."

"Superstitious?" remarked Val, maliciously. "Mr. Brayton, do you believe in ghosts?"

Brayton had heard all that there was to hear about the village legends, and he was just "boy" enough to answer:

"Can't say, Val; but I never saw one."

"Or heard one?" asked Bar.

"No, nor heard one," said Brayton; "but I believe I should like to."

"Ghosts!" exclaimed Mrs. Wood. "I s'pose it was ghosts that tied poor Dr. Dryer's dun heifer to the bell rope."

"Exactly," said Brayton. "That's the kind I imagine there are more of than any other. All very good ghosts till they are found out."

"They haven't found out that one," said Val.

"Not yet they haven't," snapped Mrs. Wood; "but I believe his right name is Zebedee Fuller."

"Nothing very ghostly about Zeb," said Bar.

"Nor the heifer," added Val.

Just then there came a pretty good gust of wind through the open window of the dining-room, and the two young conspirators could scarcely avoid a sly glance into each other's eyes.

It was a very quick flash of a glance, but George Brayton caught it.

He could not guess at its meaning just then, but he stored it away in his memory for future

reference, for it meant, as plainly as anything could, "Fun a-coming. Wait and see."

So he determined to do that very thing, and went on with his supper.

The night promised to be a dark and stormy one by the time the boys had a chance to look out on it. All the more so because the weather seemed disposed to take its own time in getting ready.

The two friends retired to their own room, and Bar astonished Val by actually going to work on his books.

"You're a queer fellow," said Val. "Why, I'm all ears."

"So am I," said Bar, "but I mean to improve my time, for all that. This wind'll do our work for us without any help of ours. Seems as if it was getting more and more westerly all the while."

Nevertheless, it required all the resolution Bar could muster to do anything worth while with his Greek, and Val vainly endeavored to find anything interesting in one of Kingsley's best novels.

So long a time went by, in fact, that even Bar

began to have half a fear that his machinery had got "stuck" in some way.

So it had, for there had been more than a little rust on those old wheels, and, in spite of the oil, the "wing" had to work back and forth a good while before it had rubbed them into anything like easy running order.

Then the wind, too, at first, had come only in fitful and insufficient gusts, and not from the right direction, and so the good people of Ogleport, early sleepers and early risers, had a fine opportunity to stow themselves away in bed before the "ghosts" got fairly loose in the belfry.

Not all of them were sufficiently easy in their minds to go to sleep at once, however, and Mrs. Dryer had just remarked to the Doctor, as a sort of clincher to a good many other things she had been saying :

"Fond of fast horses, too, Dr. Dryer ; that's the kind of man you've got. The Academy's all going to destruction. Riding 'round the country in buggies. Effie, too, what do you say to that ? Boys fighting on the green and calling it boxing-lessons. Threatening to drown you in the mill-

pond. Tying your cow's horns to the bell-rope. Buying boats on the lake ——"

"Dorothy Jane," began the principal, but he was suddenly interrupted by a deep, mournful, booming sound from the Academy belfry, and an exclamation from his wife.

"Mercy on us, Doctor, what's that?"

"Dorothy Jane," replied the Doctor, as he slowly arose in bed, "can it be within the compass of mundane possibilities that that outrageous cow ——"

"The cow? Poor thing!" returned his "third," disdainfully. "Ain't you ashamed, Dr. Dryer! Do you suppose she'd be out on such a night as this? Listen to the rain on the window. There it is again!"

"Dorothy Jane!" exclaimed the Doctor, as he sprang to his feet and began to dress himself, "this proceeding should arouse all Ogleport!"

"That bell!" mourned Mrs. Dryer.

"Yes, indeed!" replied the Doctor. "It's a terrible affliction."

George Brayton also heard the first sound made by the bell, and it somehow put him in mind of his two young friends, although he well

knew they were at that very moment in their room.

He was sure of it, if from nothing else, by the unnecessary amount of racket Bar Vernon was making in getting on his boots.

Fiercer and higher rose the strength of that reckless wind from the west, and louder and more prolonged, though terribly irregular were the clamorous peals from the Academy belfry, till not a sleeper remained in all Ogleport, except the stone-deaf grandmother of Zeb Fuller's friend, William Jones.

The worst puzzled pair of ears in all the village, however, were those of Zebedee himself.

Not only on account of the bell, but because Deacon Fuller had deemed that tolling a direct summons to the bedroom of his son, and it had required all his fatherly faith in Zeb's truthfulness to convince him that the mischief, whatever it might be, would never be traced across his own threshold.

That was very bad—so bad that Zeb enjoyed the rare luxury of looking upon himself in the character of injured innocence, but the very worst of it was that here was something going on in

his own Ogleport of which he knew no more than did "old Sol" himself.

"This must be looked to, father!" he solemnly declared. "It can hardly be the dun heifer can so soon again have forgotten herself. There's been nothing going on that I know of, that the old bell need wake up and toll about at this time o' night. We'd better go and make an investigation."

There were plenty more of the same way of thinking, and now they were gathering at the Academy door, some with umbrellas and some without, and not a few of them had brought along their lanterns.

And now the door was opened by the Rev. Dr. Dryer in person, as on the previous occasion, and the whole crowd, variously half-clad, were glad enough to get in out of the rain.

There was the mystery, however, right before them.

No rope, no cow, and the old bell banging ceaselessly away, up there in the steeple.

"She's working tip-top," whispered a cautious voice in Bar Vernon's ear. "You said as how the fun'd come the first windy night, and I footed

it over arter my sheer. It's most as good as boat-buildin'."

"All right, Puff; only keep still," returned Bar. "Let's see what they'll do about it."

There were other volunteers to go up with George Brayton that night, however, and although Zebedee Fuller crept along behind one of the trustees, he did not seem disposed to make himself at all conspicuous.

He had noted the presence of Bar and Val, but had promptly dismissed them from his calculations with the silent question:

"What do city fellows know about bells?"

Not much, perhaps, but the dripping investigators soon began to suspect that they themselves knew even less, for they failed to detect any sign of rope on the second floor.

"Now, my friends!" exclaimed the principal, triumphantly, "whoever the perpetrators may be, we are reasonably assured of their capture. They have lingered too long in the steeple!"

"Looks like it," muttered Zeb; "nobody ever engineered a dun heifer up those crooked stairs. It was a tough enough job to get her into the lower hall."

But not on the stairs, nor even to the adventurous eyes which shortly afterwards peered out upon the "deck" above, did there appear any sign of boy or man or apple-hunting cow.

Such a gale as was sweeping through the sashless frame of the bell-tower and across the vacant level of the deck at that moment!

It laid the wing of Bar Vernon's subtle invention so very flat that the tolling ceased and even the uplifted lanterns failed to discover it.

The combined light of the latter, moreover, convinced the keen eyes of George Brayton that no human form was lurking among the cross-pieces of the bell-frame in its nook overhead.

"Not a living soul, there or here," solemnly exclaimed one of the trustees.

"No rope," added another.

"It's an awful mystery," exclaimed a third.

"Ghosts from Mrs. Wood's," suggested a sepulchral voice behind them, and although they all knew it came from the lips of Zebedee Fuller, there was a very general disposition to regard their search as completed.

"He's got away, whoever he was," remarked George Brayton, "but the question is, how?"

Did the bell mean to laugh at them?

They were halfway down the stairway just then, and the tolling burst forth in a sudden fit of half frantic violence that almost made one of the trustees lose his footing.

That was quite enough for George Brayton, however, and he quietly said to the rest:

"I'm going back. Please tell Mr. Vernon I wish he would come up here."

"Now you're in for it," said Val, as he heard the message delivered.

"No, Val," said Bar, "it's all right. If I don't go up they'll find it out. I must shut it off for this time."

"Shall I come along?"

"Better not. One's enough."

One would indeed have been enough, and Zeb Fuller made two. That would have been altogether too much, if there had not somehow dimly dawned on Zebedee's mind the idea that it was his duty to keep George Brayton's attention as much as possible.

Bar found the two sitting together at the top of the stairs waiting for him, but he stepped lightly past them and out upon the deck.

It was the work of an instant, as he seemed to peer out upon the roof through that western window. The end of the rope was detached from the lower "arm" of the van and there was no danger of any more noise just then.

"Vernon," said Brayton, "do you think you could climb up there such a night as this without danger?"

"Certainly," said Bar.

"Will you?"

Bar's reply, to the intense admiration of Zeb Fuller, who would scarcely have undertaken it himself, except as out-and-out "mischief," was to climb rapidly and lightly up, till he reached the rafters beside the bell.

"Nobody here, Mr. Brayton," he shouted. "Nobody'd want to sit here and toll, anyhow!"

"Come down, then. I thought as much," replied Brayton.

Bar was down with the rapidity of a young monkey, for he now knew every inch of the way.

"Have you examined the roof?" he asked of Brayton.

"No," was the reply; "it's too wet and slip-

pery for any one to venture on to-night, and it's too dark for us to see all over it. I'm afraid we'll have to give it up."

They waited for sometime, nevertheless, visited at brief intervals by other watchers from below, but no renewal of the mysterious sounds disturbed them.

In fact, the wind was dying away now, having lasted a good while for a summer gust, and when at last Brayton led the way down-stairs, Zeb went next, and Bar had a precious moment in which he was able to step back and once more slip the end of the tolling-rope over the arm of the van.

"It won't do any harm, right away," he thought, "and there's no telling when I may have another chance to get up here."

Once or twice, in the remaining course of that eventful night, faint efforts at a clangor moaned across the green through the still falling rain, but there was not enough of them to draw the villagers again from their houses.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BELL MYSTERY REMAINS UNSOLVED

To say that the usual amount of sleeping was done in Ogleport that night would be to trifle with truth but, for all that, everybody was astir bright and early the next morning.

Why not, when there would be so remarkable an opportunity for everybody to ask everybody else :

“What do you think about it?”

Even Zeb Fuller's name was less frequently on the lips of men than on the former occasion, for this was something apparently beyond him.

And yet Zeb's “chores” had been done at railway speed that morning, and there was that in his eyes which might have been very suggestive to a man that knew him well.

Hardly had Bar and Val finished their breakfast before word was brought them by Mrs. Wood that the Fuller boy was asking for them.

“And you’d better look out for him or he’ll get you into all sorts of difficulty.”

Zebedee’s errand was a very peaceful and proper one, however, for he merely proposed to join them in their day on the lake, if they were going, and to show them some things he reckoned they had not yet seen.

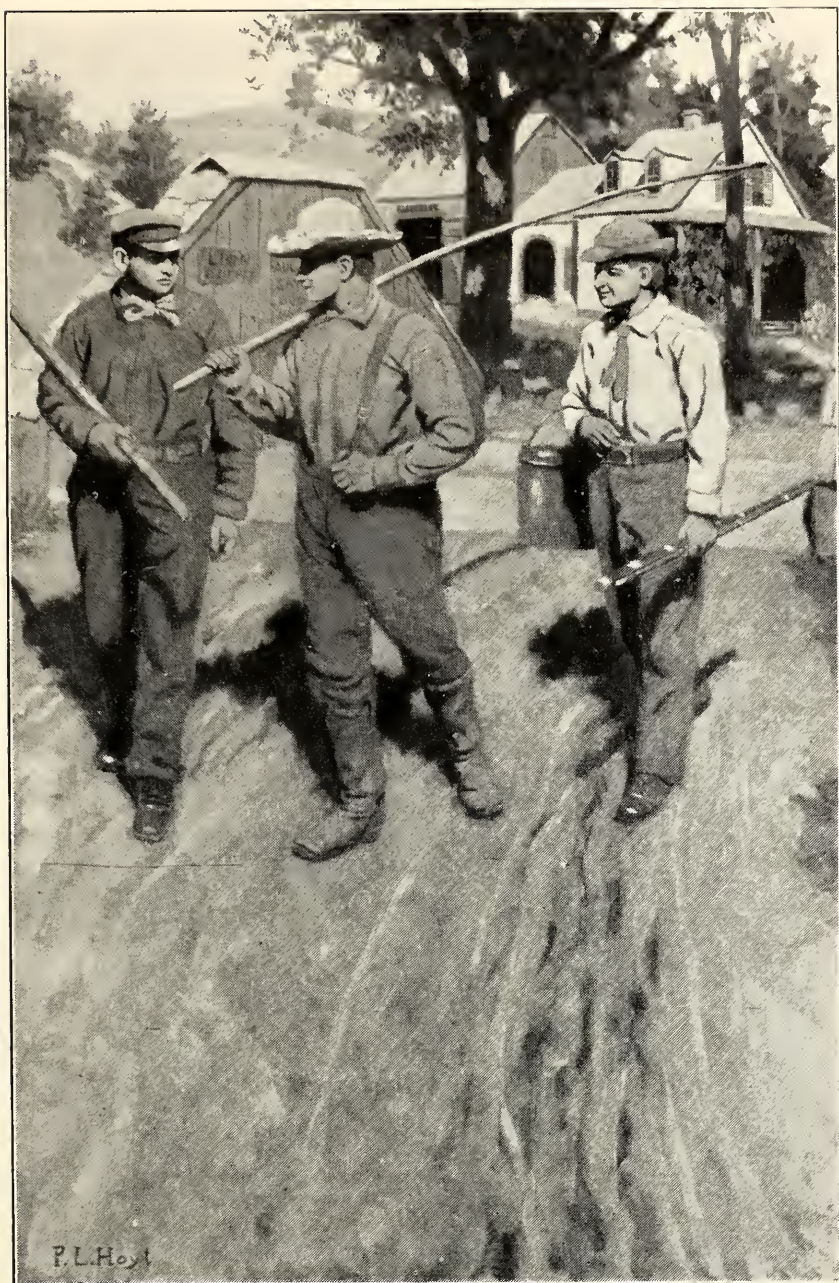
It is possible that George Brayton would have willingly kept Bar and Val within reach that day, but they were off with Zeb before he had a chance to offer any objection. Very quiet was Zeb, till the three were well out of the village, and then he turned suddenly upon Bar, with :

“He’d ha’ found it out, after all, if it hadn’t been for me.”

“Why,” said Bar, somewhat taken by surprise, “did you find it out?”

“Can’t say I did,” said Zeb, as if ashamed of such a confession, “but I knew that rope along the timber and under that wheel had something to do with it. So I kept between him and that as much as I could.”

“You’re a trump, Zeb,” shouted Bar. “I wondered myself how it was he failed to see that, dark as it was, when they had so many lanterns.



“HE'D HA' FOUND IT OUT, IF IT HADN'T BEEN FOR ME”

The Bell Mystery Remains Unsolved 283

But there they were, all of them looking up and couldn't see it."

"Brayton's was the only good pair of eyes among 'em," said Zeb, "and he was looking up, too, most of the time. But will it toll again?"

"How should I know?" asked Bar.

"Look here," exclaimed Zeb; "there isn't another chap in or about Ogleport that can do that belfry climbing. Brayton understands that as well as I do."

"I'm afraid he does," said Val, thoughtfully. "If there should be a wind this afternoon, now?"

"Oh! that's it, is it?" exclaimed Zeb. "Why didn't I think of that before? I give it up. You fellows beat me. To think that I should never have thought of the wind!"

There was little more to be done except to explain the exact particulars, and when Bar had done that, Zeb stopped in front of him and removed from his head the broad-brimmed and somewhat battered "straw," saying,

"Barnaby Vernon, you can take my hat. I think I must emigrate."

"Emigrate?" said Val Manning.

"Yes," replied Zeb, dolefully; "there isn't room for him and me in the same village. And yet I must remain and see how he and Solomon will work together. Old Sol has his eye on you, my boy, but you needn't be afraid of George Brayton. I've great confidence in George."

But the boys were not the only part of the village population that continued to be exercised about the bell business.

Dr. Dryer instituted what he called "an exhaustive analysis of the mysterious phenomenon" at an early hour in the forenoon, but he never put his head above the "deck," and he acquired no additional wisdom.

Brayton had deemed his own search of the previous night sufficient for the present, and he had, besides, some private matters of his own to attend to that day.

His morning mail had brought him news of some of these, and had sent him to Mrs. Wood with a request that she would prepare a room for his mother and sister, who were coming to pay him a visit.

There was no reason, thought his landlady, why he should get so very much flushed in the

The Bell Mystery Remains Unsolved 285

face about it; but George Brayton did not care the rest of that day whether the Academy had one bell or ten.

Mrs. Dryer did, however, and she talked "bell" till her pretty stepdaughter could stand it no longer, but put on her bonnet for a very aimless flight among her neighbors.

There, too, it was the bell, the bell, till poor Effie reached a state of mind which led her to say to George Brayton, when she met him crossing the green:

"Please don't speak to me. I don't want to hear another word about it."

"About what?" asked the very much astonished young man.

"That dreadful bell!" exclaimed Effie.

"Oh! I'd forgotten there was one," replied Brayton. "You see, I've good news this morning. My mother and sister are coming to see me——"

"How very pleasant!" interrupted Effie; "and they know nothing about the bell—there, my hat. Oh, dear me! there it goes again!"

There it went, sure enough, Effie's very pretty hat, with George Brayton after it halfway across

the green, and at that moment and with the breath of that one sudden gust, the obnoxious character in the steeple had uttered a grating and sonorous warning that there was life and mischief in him yet.

Just that one malicious effort did the village monster make, but that was enough, and in five minutes more there were a hundred pairs of eyes straining up at the steeple on all sides, and Dr. Dryer, accompanied by his faithful "third," was striding across the green with the key in his hand.

Even in that moment of concentrated thought and feeling, however, Mrs. Dryer's vision swept in all the surrounding circumstances, and she exclaimed, in the tone of an injured angel:

"I told you so. There's Effie with George Brayton out there on the green, and she's bare-headed, too. It's awful! There, he's had her hat in his hand. Doctor, what do you say to such doings? Are you a post?"

"A humble pillar, I hope, Dorothy Jane," replied the Doctor, but there was no time for anything more.

"Are you not going to help them?" asked Effie of Brayton.

The Bell Mystery Remains Unsolved 287

“No, indeed. Why should I?” he asked. “There’s enough of ’em now. Too many, in fact. Besides, if they find out what’s the matter, they’ll be sure to let the rest of us know.”

It looked very much as if the young man was right, but the curious part of it was, after all, that not one of that crowd, nor all of them together, did more than rummage the Academy after hidden human beings.

They were all equally sure that there was no one up in the belfry, and so that part of the building was left to keep its own secrets and those of Mrs. Wood’s ghosts.

Meantime, George Brayton and Effie had the pleasantest kind of a walk and talk, and Mrs. Dryer was enabled to bottle-up an immense amount of wrath against her next meeting with her stepdaughter.

In fact, when that much-disturbed lady came out of the Academy, after the fruitless raid of the villagers, she was unable to so much as even smile in the bewildered faces of her neighbors, thereby sending them all away with a deeper sense than ever of the gloomy depth of the cloud which seemed to be settling over Ogleport and its Academy.

CHAPTER XXIV

MAJOR MONTAGUE HAS A VISITOR

ON the morning after the visit of Mr. Ashbel Norton, old Judge Danvers was opening his mail. He had spent a good part of the previous evening with Dr. Manning, and the remainder with a pair of the best "detectives" in the city. There was evidently something heavy weighing upon his mind, for he tore open his letters, one by one, and seemed to glance over them almost mechanically.

That is, he did so until, as he looked listlessly into one of them, he gave a sudden start and almost sprang to his feet.

That was a good deal for such a man, but his next movement was to ring his table-bell, and send out in all haste for a carriage, exclaiming :

"I'll go to see him at once!"

Half an hour later, Major Montague had company of the most respectable sort in the reception-room of his compulsory boarding-house.

The great iron-barred doors of the sombre building had opened almost obsequiously, to admit Judge Danvers, and the Major himself had been surprised at so prompt a response to his venturesome letter. Perhaps he failed to see that nothing could better have suited the Judge, if he cared to find him at all, than to find him under just those very circumstances.

"You can get me out of this, easily enough," he said, after a brief conversation.

"Of course," calmly responded the lawyer, "but I don't see very clearly why I should meddle with it. I'm on the other side, you know."

"What other side?" asked the Major.

"Why, Mr. Vernon's," replied the Judge. "So long as you're locked up here I'm sure you won't bother him."

"Very true," said the Major with a leer that was meant to be very knowing; "but as long as I'm here I'll keep my mouth shut as to some things he'd like very much to know."

"A year will settle that now," replied the Judge, "if I don't find it out sooner. Meantime, he's doing very well."

"He might lose a good deal in a year," sug-

gested the Major. "I'm really Bar's friend, and I wouldn't like to see him do that."

"Then tell me what you know!"

"Not till I'm out of this," exclaimed the Major, with great energy, "and not till I see those papers. There's things that nobody else can explain."

"Well," replied the Judge, thoughtfully, "I think I'll go to work about you. Take two or three days, you know. And even then I'll fix it so you'll walk right back here again if you break your word."

Major Montague must have felt even surer about the lawyer's power in the premises than he did himself, so abjectly and earnestly did he labor to assure the Judge of the honesty of his intentions.

A few days in prison will sometimes have a wonderfully quieting and sobering effect, and the Major was just the sort of man to yield to such an agency.

Judge Danvers left the prison feeling as if he had somehow stumbled upon a very promising piece of work, but he had a good deal more before him that day, and he meant to be out of the city on the evening train.

As for Major Montague, after the lawyer's departure and his return to his own very narrow quarters, he sunk upon his cot bed with a remarkably sulky expression of countenance.

"I haven't told him anything," he muttered; "but he's bound to know. I reckon I can always keep some kind of a hold on Barnaby, but there ain't any ready money to be made out of the Judge. Never mind; I'll see my way to something before I get through with 'em all. See if I don't."

Bar Vernon's affairs were in good hands, beyond a doubt, and no man of Major Montague's calibre was likely to "get up much earlier in the morning" than Bar's self-appointed counsel.

Nevertheless, Bar had a good deal of a surprise in store for him.

The days had now followed one another until the regular time for "opening the Academy" was close at hand, and nearly all things were in readiness.

"Bar," said Brayton, that night, after another tug at the Greek, "you and I can fix the rope on the bell to-morrow evening, can't we, without calling in anybody else?"

"Val and I can do it in ten minutes without troubling you at all," replied Bar. "If you'll give us the key in the morning we'll attend to it right after breakfast."

There was nothing dull about George Brayton, but he seemed to fall into Bar's proposition as easily as Gershom Todderley had fallen into the mill-pond.

He must have had a good deal on his mind, indeed.

"Anyhow," said Val, as they were getting ready for bed, "we must take Zeb Fuller along. It's only fair after what he did the other night."

"All right," said Bar. "School begins next day after, and we must have Zeb pull with us or we'll lose half the fun of the term."

There was no difficulty in the morning in securing Zeb's company.

The only trouble was in avoiding the additional presence of half the boys in the village.

The first consequence was that Zebedee had a good look at Bar Vernon's invention, for which he had been aching, and the second was, that the rope was rigged over the big wheel for ordinary

“ringing” purposes, without any special disturbance of the extraordinary “tolling gear.”

The latter had to be unhitched, indeed, but was left all ready for use at any time when a high west wind should conspire with other favoring circumstances.

“I can hardly understand, even now,” remarked Zeb, as they were coming out of the Academy, “how it was that Brayton failed to discover that thing at the time, or else to hunt it out afterwards. Depend upon it, boys, there’s something the matter with George.”

He scarcely had the words out of his mouth before their path was crossed by the very hasty feet of Effie Dryer, though where she could be going was not so clear as Zeb thought it ought to be even to him.

One brief glance and a nod was all the notice she gave them, but in so doing she turned her face full upon them for a moment, and Zeb immediately turned to his friends with:

“Do you see that, boys? Euphemia’s been crying. That stepmother of hers! Or can it be old Sol himself has been cutting up? It’s a very distressing case.”

“Why so?” asked Bar.

“Why?” said Zeb. “Well, because that young woman has no proper knowledge of the art of crying. The only thing she understands well is laughing. I declare, if old Sol and his wife are going to put that kind of work upon Euphemia!”

And Zebedee looked as if it might indeed turn out badly for Solomon in such a case.

The rest of the day was so full of preparations for “school-opening” that there was really no chance for anything else, and the Ogleport boys were pretty generally on their good behavior.

Even Puff Evans was left to hammer away at his new boat, all day, without the sign of a temptation to leave it and go fishing.

In the afternoon, however, when the stage from the north came lumbering in, Bar Vernon and Val Manning had better been at home.

George Brayton was, and he had no one to help him in with his mother and Sibyl. He seemed perfectly well satisfied about it, however, and spent all the rest of the time with them till the supper bell rang.

Major Montague Has a Visitor 295

Then, indeed, for the first time in his life, Bar Vernon found out what a genuinely bashful boy he could be.

Of course he was glad to see Sibyl and her mother. So was Val Manning. But then Val seemed so altogether at ease and unconcerned about it, and did not once blush or stammer, while poor Bar did both.

In fact, he felt altogether unsafe about his neck-tie, his shirt-collar, and the way his hair was brushed. He'd have given half his money on hand for a good look in his glass up-stairs.

He was very sure, nevertheless, that there was not a prettier girl in all the world than Sibyl Brayton.

He and Val did their best to amuse the newcomers during the evening, and it was very good of Effie Dryer to come in and help them, only Sibyl deemed her brother unnecessarily long in seeing the Doctor's daughter home, at the end of it all.

"The worst of it is," said Bar to Val, when they were in their own room, "we are to have lots of ladies and other visitors at the chapel to-morrow."

"Yes," replied Val, "but it doesn't amount to anything. They never ask a fellow anything they aren't sure he knows. It's just for all the world like an examination-day."

"But that's awful, ain't it?" asked Bar.

"Yes," replied Val, "it's an awful fraud, unless one of the teachers has a grudge against you. Then it's a fraud, too, only there's good fun in it, 'specially if they're at work on Zeb Fuller."

The next day was destined to be an interesting one for Bar Vernon, however, for other reasons than the arrival of Sibyl Brayton and her mother.

The increasing numbers of the people of all sorts, scholars included, compelled a transfer of the "exercises" to the "great hall" on the second floor of the Academy building.

Bar rather liked that at first, but the stage from the South arrived before the bell had done ringing, and the next thing he knew there was an addition to the "distinguished guests," as Mrs. Dryer would have described the highly respectable people on the "platform," that not only deeply impressed "old Sol" himself, but sent all the blood in Bar's body to his head.

How he and the rest got through with the "opening" business he could scarcely have told, but he knew there was something unusual coming for him or Val, when he saw Judge Danvers waiting for them.

"Very promising young gentlemen, your ward and the son of Dr. Manning," he heard Dr. Dryer say, as they were edging their way through the crowd. "My assistant, Mr. Brayton, has them under his especial charge."

They were very near now ; but somebody else was nearer, and had caught the meaning of the principal's last remark.

"Judge," said Zebedee Fuller, gravely, as he held out his hand, "I'm proud to meet you, but are you responsible for sending Bar Vernon to Ogleport?"

For once in his life Judge Danvers found himself "on the witness-stand," and all he could say on the spur of the moment was :

"Perhaps so. Why?"

"Because it's a very restricted sphere of usefulness for such a man."

And Zebedee marched solemnly on as if unconscious that the eyes of Doctor and Mrs.

Dryer, as well as half the Board of Trustees, were following him with anything but a charitable look.

"That," said Effie to Sibyl, "is the genius of Ogleport."

Twenty minutes later, Judge Danvers and Bar were alone in the room of the latter at Mrs. Wood's.

The Judge did not seem disposed to explain very fully the cause of his coming, but shortly came to it in this form :

"You brought that black valise with you?"

"Of course I did!" said Bar.

"Hardly safe here. It ought to be under lock and key."

"I've thought of that," said Bar, "but I've no place to put it."

"Will you trust it to me?"

"Certainly, and very glad to do so," replied Bar. "It's only a trouble to me. I can't even open it, and sometimes I lie awake nights, wondering what there may be in it."

"I've been almost up to that point myself," said the Judge. "I want to say one thing more. I will keep your promise for you as to opening it,

unless I can get you formally released from it. How is that?"

"I've nothing to say," replied Bar. "I never did break my word, and I never mean to. That's all I care for."

"You're pretty safe then," said the Judge. "But tell me, who is this Mr. Brayton?"

Bar gave him all the information in his power, but Judge Danver's face seemed to grow more and more cloudily thoughtful all the while.

"Nice people, all of them, no doubt," he said, at last; "but they may or may not be good friends of yours. I won't say any more just now, only this: If you get a telegram from me to come to the city, tell nobody but Val where you are going, or why, and just come right along. Have you money enough?"

"Plenty!" said Bar.

"Then I must be off. Take care of yourself, my boy, and give my compliments to that Zebedee Fuller. There's the making of a man in him."

Judge Danvers probably meant "The making of a lawyer," for that was his highest ideal of man—and perhaps he was not far wrong, consid-

ering the kind of lawyer he had made of himself. And so Bar was left to apologize as best he might to all inquirers for the sudden appearance and disappearance of his "distinguished counsel."

CHAPTER XXV

MR. ASHBEL NORTON

THE evening after the "opening exercises" at the Academy, and after the sudden appearance in Ogleport of the great city lawyer, and his equally sudden departure, George Brayton was sitting for awhile with his mother and sister in their own room.

"And so your friend is to be here to-morrow?" he asked of Mrs. Brayton.

"We do not know yet if we can call him our friend," replied she, "but I wrote him we were coming here, and he replied that this would be as convenient as any other place. Now he writes that he will arrive to-morrow."

"It seems so like a romance," began Sibyl, "I can hardly believe it to be real, but ——"

"Real or not real," said George, "the legacy will pay off our mortgages and make us very comfortable. So I shan't have to drudge out my life at Ogleport with Dr. Dryer. Then if the rest should come!"

"I feel almost sure it won't," exclaimed Sibyl. "Seems to me it really belongs to some one else, and I hope he may get it."

"Money is a very useful thing, Sibyl," said Mrs. Brayton, with a smile. "When you are older you may not think so lightly of it."

"And yet, mother," said George, "Sibyl is right. Besides, we are very much in the dark till we have heard the whole of the story."

Nevertheless, little as they might know, they continued to discuss it until a much later hour than those commonly kept by the boarders at Mrs. Wood's.

Bar and Val, in their own room, were at the same time busily engaged in a discussion of the several events of the day, including Judge Danvers and Sibyl Brayton.

Bar, indeed, was more than usually frank with his friend, and Val was beginning to take a deeper interest than ever in his remarkable chum.

"Depend upon it, Bar," he said, "old Judge Danvers didn't travel all the way up here for nothing. I shall expect that telegram, now, every day till it comes."

“So shall I,” replied Bar.

Nevertheless, they were destined to go on “expecting” for more days than were at all comfortable for the uneasy heads of such a pair of boys, though Bar Vernon seemed to “bear up” under the trial of his patience a good deal better than did Val.

The next day, of course, was crammed full of “school,” and Bar Vernon’s first surprise came in the shape of a discovery that it would not be half so hard as he had feared for him to keep up with the several “classes” in which he found himself.

He would, as Brayton showed him, have to do a good deal of “back study,” going over a great deal of ground that was all an old story to the rest; but then, with such a memory as his and with plucky hard work, he would soon make it all up. Especially as in several important branches, he would hardly have to study at all, as yet, and could give his whole time to the things in which he was “behind.”

That was a hard day’s duty for George Brayton, but he stuck to it manfully, although well aware that his mother and sister and their very

important visitor were impatiently waiting for him most of the afternoon.

He managed to elude Dr. Dryer at the close, however, and the boys themselves were hardly out of the building more promptly than was the new "assistant," a circumstance which by no means eluded the keen eyes of Effie Dryer's stepmother.

"A mere eye-servant," she assured the Doctor. "That young man seems to consider himself entirely independent of your control. To think of his going away in that manner, without your permission!"

Dreadful, no doubt, but then Mrs. Dryer would have given half her teeth, much as they cost, if she had known who was waiting for him, and what it was he hurried home to talk about.

"My son, Mr. George Brayton—Mr. Ashbel Norton, George."

The two men stood for a moment looking at each other, and then the Englishman remarked:

"Happy to meet you, Mr. Brayton. I've already said nearly all I have to say, but we can go over it again, if you wish."

"I should like it, indeed," said George; "and it seems to concern us both, if I understand it."

And then followed an hour of very earnest talk ending with Brayton's saying :

"You seem to have done all that the circumstances required. If he is not found, it will not be your fault. Of course, you were careful in your selection of counsel ?"

"Yes, indeed," replied Norton. "My bankers recommended me to a Judge Danvers, who seems to stand very high ——"

"Danvers ?" exclaimed George. "Why, he was here yesterday."

"Here? Judge Danvers? Now, do you know that seems very odd indeed ! How very singular ! And to think I missed him so narrowly. But, then, I suppose such a man has a good deal of business on his hands besides our own. I'm going on to meet him in a day or two. Indeed, he told me to be gone a week, but I find I can't stand it. No fun at all, you know, with so much at stake."

"I should say not," replied George, but he found himself looking straight into the eyes of his pretty sister.

Could it be that her quick and somewhat romantic young brain had caught a glimpse of the

same thought which was slowly dawning upon his own ?

Whether or not, neither of them said a word about it then to each other, or even after Mr. Ashbel Norton had retired to his own room ; and the stage carried him away next morning with no other apparent result of his visit to Ogleport than a conviction that Sibyl Brayton was the very prettiest girl that he had ever seen in America, and a determination that he would return at once to the city and “see what that old fox of a lawyer was up to.”

The day of his departure was a Friday, and when the Academy doors were closed they were not to be opened again till Monday, for Dr. Dryer had not yet perfected his usual plans for robbing the boys of the morning half of their weekly holiday. That would be sure to come, in due time, but as yet the entire day was free.

Bar and Val had been getting up a plan of their own, and it carried them, at their very best pace, out to Puff Evans's the moment that school was out.

A long, fast, hot walk to be sure, but they found Puff delighted to see them and to show

them what really marvelous progress he had made upon his new boat.

"You was right about Skinner," he said to Bar. "The old weasel had a feller down here, snookin' 'round and askin' questions. I jist showed him everything and told him he could go over and see you, if he wanted to buy any one of the boats. He didn't come, did he?"

"No, and he won't," said Bar; "but we must have the *Mary* all ready to-morrow. You've never painted her name on her. How long would it take?"

"Do it in no time," said Puff. "Be all dry in the mornin'."

"Then she'll have to be called the *Sibyl*, for to-morrow," said Bar, with more color than usual in his face. "Paint it as nicely as you can. When I sell her back to you, you can name her over again if you choose."

"All right," replied Puff. "That's a good enough name for a boat, anyhow. I've seen right big boats and nice ones, too, with the meanest kind of names."

Val Manning chuckled in Bar's very face, as Puff declared his not very complimentary assent,

but Bar seemed to have nothing to say, and they went home to supper.

"Now, Mrs. Brayton," said Bar, just before they left the table, "there isn't a bit of danger, and I'm so glad you've consented. I'm sorry you can't go ; but Mr. Brayton himself can take care of Miss Sibyl. Then there's one thing more I have to ask of her."

"What's that ?" said Sibyl.

"Why, I'm only a boy, you know, and I wouldn't dare to go over and ask Dr. Dryer's daughter to come, too. She'd be company for you, and if you'd only do me the favor to ask her for me, I'd be ever so much obliged."

Bar could hardly understand why Mrs. Brayton's eyebrows should contract so suddenly as they did, or why George Brayton should so promptly come to his support, with :

"That'll be just the thing, Sibyl. She's tried to be polite to you and mother, and I'm sure she'd enjoy it."

If Mrs. Brayton had meant to put in any objection it was too late now, for Sibyl was even demonstrative in her readiness to secure the company of Effie Dryer.

“She’s the merriest, sweetest, nicest girl,” exclaimed Sibyl. “She’s years older than I am, but she makes me feel perfectly at home with her. Of course I may, mamma?”

“Certainly, my dear,” was Mrs. Brayton’s half doubtful reply, but there must have been a vein of mischief in Val Manning for he instantly proposed to accompany Sibyl in her call at the principal’s house.

It was curious that both Bar Vernon and George Brayton should feel at the same moment, as if they would like to see Val Manning tumble into the mill-pond with his clothes on!

His goodness was its own reward, however, for he had the happiness, shortly afterwards, of being smiled on by Mrs. Dryer and preached to by her husband for a round hour, while Sibyl and Effie were having a good long talk all by themselves.

When the latter came at last to Val’s rescue, however, it suddenly became very difficult for Mrs. Dryer to look sweet, for Effie’s first words were, “So kind of Mrs. Brayton, is it not, papa?”

“Doubtless, my daughter, but in what manner

has she exhibited her benevolence of disposition?"

"Why hasn't Mr. Manning told you? She has sent Sibyl over to invite me to a ride in the boat to-morrow. Mr. Brayton will go with us and there won't be any danger. I haven't been out on the lake for ever so long."

"I'm so glad you're going," said Val, promptly. "Puff Evans is making another boat. I'm so sorry it isn't done, Mrs. Dryer, as then we should have room for you and the Doctor as well. We think our boat is a great beauty."

"Indeed she is," added Effie. "If it's a pleasant day we can sail as well as row."

To do Dr. Dryer justice, the thought of making any objection never entered his head, though that was what got him into trouble after Val and Sibyl were gone.

As for Euphemia herself, that merry but unthoughtful maiden saw so clearly the signs of a coming storm in the now wintry smile of her stepmother, that she actually put on her hat and walked across the green with Sibyl Brayton and Val.

The latter had done his part to admiration,

and was therefore content to delegate to George Brayton the duty of seeing Effie safely home again.

A long way home, considering the size of the green. At least, that was what Mrs. Brayton made up her mind to before she heard her son close the door of his room on his return.

Whatever may have been Mrs. Brayton's thoughts, however, she wisely kept them to herself.

So did Zebedee Fuller, although he remarked aloud, as he returned to his father's house that evening :

"Yes, I fully approve of that. Euphemia is a fine young woman, and George is displaying good sense. I wonder how it will strike old Sol? I hope he won't like it. I've seen Dorothy Jane look sideways at George. There's every reason to hope she hates him. Wouldn't that be a pill, now? And they'd have to take it, for the property's all Euphemia's, and she'll be of age in less'n two years. I could scarcely have planned it better myself."

And Zebedee chuckled an exceedingly great and satisfied chuckle.

He had been over to see Bar Vernon about having a grand good time on the lake, next day, and had been sharply disappointed at the disturbance of his plans. Bar had finally persuaded him, however, that there was plenty of room on the lake, and that he and the other fellows might just as well get such boats as they could and have their fishing.

“And I suppose, Bar,” said Zebedee, “you and Val and the rest will know enough not to interfere with us. If there’s anything in the wide world that unsettles my intellect, it’s a young lady.”

“You shan’t be afflicted,” laughed Bar. “You may have the whole lake except the very patch of water we are fishing in.”

CHAPTER XXVI

A FEW SURPRISING DISCLOSURES

WHEN Judge Danvers returned to the city he at once set himself to the completion of his plans for the liberation of Major Montague.

This was all the easier, because the very man who had caused that gentleman's arrest had done so without any intention of actually bringing him to any "trial and conviction."

Such a net as they had cast around the Major was readily untangled by the skilful fingers of the great lawyer, even while he transferred the whole of it to his own control.

As to the moderate sum of money it cost him, he never once thought of that.

The immediate consequences were twofold.

The first, that Major Montague found himself that Saturday morning, sitting in front of the Judge's table in the inner room of his *suite* of "offices," to all appearances, at least, a free man again.

The second, that the moment the doors of the prison closed behind him and he found his movements once more untrammelled, Major Montague began to feel a strong return of his habitual "bumptiousness," not to say insolence, of disposition.

"I'm out now," he said to himself, "and old Danvers 'll never dream of sending me back again. Besides, I don't half believe he can. Anyhow, I mean to make some kind of terms for myself before I tell him all I know. It's the best card I've got and he must pay for it before he plays it."

Another idea, and one against the evil of which Judge Danvers ought to have carefully guarded him, had been that he would go and poison himself with "just about five fingers of old rye," before he went to the lawyer's office.

Not that such a man could find anything like intoxication in a single drink of whiskey, however liberal, but that it supplied him with the very kind of wooden-headed obstinacy which he thought he needed, and which fools of his kind—all fools who drink whiskey—mistake for courage.

"I can face him down now," he muttered, as he reached the door, "only I wish I'd put in just one more real good snifter."

Another, most likely, would have been followed by "just one more," for his prison fare had left him very "dry."

There he was now, however, with the hard penetrating eyes of Judge Danvers looking him through and through as he asked him :

"Did you ever see that black valise before?"

"It's the one Jack Chills stole from me the day he ran away," said the Major, with a toss of his head.

"No nonsense, please," calmly responded the lawyer. "Now, you've promised to tell me the history of it and what is in it. Perhaps the shortest way will be to open it at once."

"That's my property, Judge," said the Major, in a voice which was getting louder and firmer. "It's mine, and I'll open it when and where I please. I'll thank you to hand it right over to me."

"Hand it over to you?" exclaimed the lawyer.

"Yes, or pay me my own price for it. I want ten thousand down, and good security ——"

“Pay you—you miserable jail-bird!” almost fiercely interrupted the angry lawyer. “I’ll pay you ——”

Under other circumstances, the manifest indignation of so dangerous a man as Judge Danvers would probably have cowed the Major at once, but the alcoholic poison he had absorbed had done its usual work. He was—or seemed to be—perfectly sober, but the idea uppermost in his mind at the moment, was that he could assert his ownership of that valise, and that he had the physical strength to “clean out” not only the lawyer, but his whole office full of clerks.

He sprang to his feet, therefore, and was reaching out his long, powerful arm towards the black leather prize, when the door of the office swung open, just as Judge Danvers struck sharply upon his sonorous little table-bell.

“Mr. Norton!” exclaimed the Judge, whose usually placid face was fairly purple with indignation.

“Norton!” echoed Major Montague, as he drew back his hand and turned to face the newcomer.

“Davis!” shouted the Judge to the clerk who

now put his head inside the door, "call an officer and ask him to wait outside."

"One here now, sir," responded the clerk.

"All right," said the Judge. "Sit down, Montague. Mr. Norton, I am glad to see you, but I'm very much occupied at this moment. Please excuse me till I'm done with this person."

"Ah! yes, of course; I beg your pardon, really," returned the Englishman. "But, Judge Danvers, if you'll allow me, I'd like to take a look at your friend there. Did I hear you call him Montague?"

There was a strong expression of disgust on the lawyer's face when Norton began, but it was now rapidly changing to one of intense curiosity if not of expectation.

That of Major Montague, however, had undergone an even more complete and rapid transformation.

He had even made a motion towards the door, without so much as grasping for the valise, but the assured presence of the "officer" in the outer room came crushingly upon him, and he sank back on his chair in a state of mind that was

plainly too much for even the strength of the "old rye."

Mr. Ashbel Norton walked slowly and steadily forward, looking straight in the face of the Major, and it instantly occurred to Judge Danvers that there was a decided resemblance to be traced between them, although the Englishman was somewhat the more slender and younger looking of the two.

The only remark the Judge made was, however, "Major Montague—Mr. Ashbel Norton," as if he were formally introducing two gentlemen.

"Montague!" again repeated the latter. "Now, that's very good indeed! Bob, you old sinner, have I found you at last? What have you done with Lydia's child? Where are the papers? Montague, indeed! Judge Danvers, I'm more sorry and ashamed than I can tell you; but I am compelled to make you acquainted with my elder brother, Mr. Robert Norton, formerly a gentleman and a Major in the British army. What he is now you may perhaps know as well as I do."

The most cowardly of all wild beasts, from a

wolf down to a rat, will show fight when he is cornered, and the "Major" was, probably, never a physical poltroon.

Well was it, therefore, that Ashbel Norton had been an "Eton boy" and was a master of the art of self-defence. Well too, probably, that his graceless brother had no better weapon than his huge fist at his command.

Ashbel warded off very skilfully the half-dozen furious blows which were rained upon him, but without once "striking back," and by that time there was a heavier hand than that of Judge Danvers could have been, upon the shoulder of the Major, and the "thud" of an officer's "locust" was beginning to sound on his head and arms.

It was a hopeless sort of business, and the sudden gust of uncontrollable rage died away into a fit of utter dejection.

"Yes, Ash," he exclaimed, as he was again forced down upon a chair, "you've found me. I should have made it all right myself, in a little while. I was making arrangements for that very thing."

"Make it right, Robert?" exclaimed Ashbel

Norton. "You make it right? I won't speak of the money you've wasted or the family you have disgraced. I won't say anything of the way you ruined yourself and tried to ruin others! Make it right? Can you make it right with Lydia, for all she has suffered, or with your own wife?"

"Ashbel," huskily replied the now drooping and trembling Major, "don't speak of my wife. I saw her death in the papers, years ago."

"And she died of a broken heart," interrupted Ashbel.

"But Lydia," continued the Major, "I can do something for her. I've kept every paper and ——"

"Robert," exclaimed Ashbel, "Lydia, too, is dead, and that, also, is on your own conscience."

"Lydia dead? That, too, on me?" half vacantly responded the Major. Whatever may have been on his "conscience," just then, if indeed he still kept any such thing about him, his mind was grasping at a very different idea, for his next question was:

"And did she leave a will?"

"Indeed she did," replied Ashbel, half angrily.

"You've no chance there. Judge Danvers has a copy of it in his safe."

The Major stole a quick glance at the table where the valise had been, but it had disappeared. That too, was now "in the safe."

"And so Lydia's dead," slowly soliloquized the Major, as he bent his eyes upon the floor. "And she's made a will. That was a turn of things that never occurred to me."

"Nothing ever did seem to occur to you, except your own brutal selfishness," remarked Mr. Ashbel Norton, but the Major turned now to Judge Danvers, with:

"I'm ready to hear anything you've got to say about that valise, Judge."

"Say?" exclaimed Ashbel Norton. "I'm the only man who has anything to say about that, Judge Danvers. You will understand that he has nothing more to do with any of those effects."

"They are in my charge," quietly remarked the Judge, "not only as your own legal representative, but also as counsel for the claimant in the case, by whom they were deposited with me."

"You have found him, then?" almost shouted Mr. Ashbel Norton.

"Perhaps," replied the Judge. "At all events it will be necessary to protect ourselves against any escape of Mr. Robert Norton. He must be kept under lock and key till we need him again."

"Judge," exclaimed the Major, "didn't you give me your promise?"

"And didn't I keep it," asked Judge Danvers. "And didn't you break your own, as soon as you thought you had a chance? Take him in charge, Mr. Officer. I'll come right along and attend to his commitment. Mr. Norton, I must really ask you to excuse me until Monday at ten o'clock. I have other persons to consult in this matter. I hope you feel assured that your interests are safe in my hands."

The Englishman seemed in a sort of brown study for a moment, but then he held out his hand, saying heartily:

"I don't quite understand it, indeed, but you seem to have done wonders, already. The presence here of my unfortunate brother, so completely in your power, proves that. So does the

fact that you seem to have obtained possession of the papers in so short a time. I'd no idea the American detective police was up to that sort of thing. Indeed, my dear sir, I trust the whole matter entirely to your discretion."

"And I shall see you on Monday morning at ten?" said the Judge.

"Without fail," replied Norton, "only I can't see how I'll take care of myself during the meantime."

"You can manage that, I guess," said the old lawyer, as he grasped his hat and hurried away.

His first care was to see that "Major Montague" was properly secured where he could be had when wanted, and he might well be pardoned any lack of anxiety as to where and how Mr. Ashbel Norton should worry away his time over Sunday.

The Major's affair was a very easy and simple one, thanks to his hot temper and folly, but, as soon as that was attended to, Judge Danvers had an errand to the house of Dr. Manning.

His conference with the good physician was by no means a brief one, and Val's kind-faced

mother was called in for her share of it, but when it was concluded, Dr. Manning said :

“It’s really very wonderful, all of it. I’m very glad such an opportunity has come to me. Of course, you can depend on me for any amount of money it may cost to secure justice. How much do you require now ?”

“Money !” exclaimed the Judge. “Not a cent. Why, this is my affair. Do you take me for a pauper ?”

“Hardly that,” said the Doctor, with a benevolent smile. “You are richer than I am, for all I know, but I can’t consent to let you work for nothing or pay my law bills.”

“Your bills !” exclaimed the Judge. “Do you think a man has no soul because he’s a lawyer ? I know that’s the prevailing impression, but it’s wrong in my case.”

“I believe that fully,” replied Dr. Manning ; “but I want you to understand that I have at least as deep an interest in this matter as you have.”

“Well, then,” replied the Judge, “if I lose anything in it, I’ll call on you for your check for half. Is that fair ?”

“Perfectly,” said Dr. Manning. “When shall you send for him?”

“First thing Monday,” said the Judge. “I arranged that with him when I was there. We’ll have this matter settled, or nearly so, before we’re a week older.”

That was all very well for them who seemed to understand it, but what of the two impatient boys up there in Ogleport?

What, too, of Mr. Ashbel Norton, fretting and fuming at his hotel, or in aimless drives around the city?

What, more than all, of Major Montague, *alias* “Major Robert Norton, formerly of the British army,” as he drooped and muttered behind the bars of his solitary prison cell?

“I never dreamed of this,” he said, as if reproaching somebody. “It came awfully near it sometimes, that’s a fact; but I always thought I could fend it off somehow. I always did, too till that young rascal caught me in a bad way, and run off with that valise. And so poor Lydia’s dead, and she’s left a will! Don’t I wish I knew just what was in that will!”

Very likely he did, but, just as likely it would

not have done him any especial amount of good if he had been familiar with every word of it.

He was only one of the vast crowd of human beings who "make their own bed" and then have to lie on it.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE FISHING PARTY

THAT Saturday morning dawned fair enough in Ogleport.

To be sure, there were a few clouds lurking along the far away outlines of the hills, but they did not seem to amount to anything in particular; not even enough to justify Mrs. Dryer in bringing such a very cloudy face to the breakfast-table.

She had said all she had to say, and that was no very small thing, to the Doctor, before they went to sleep the night before and as soon as they waked up that morning, but she had somehow failed in getting a fair chance at Euphemia.

In fact, for once in her life, to say the very least, Effie Dryer's face was not altogether sunny. The usually smiling mouth had settled into lines that betokened a mind made up and a temper not to be trifled with.

It is barely possible that her father's third wife

had sense enough to understand the meaning of Effie's face, and so, although there were clouds enough at that end of the breakfast-table, they followed the good example of those on the hills and waited a better opportunity before breaking into anything like a storm.

As for George Brayton, he had decided that the trip to the lake should not be a "walk," and Runner's best pair of horses, in front of what he was pleased to call a "baroosh," were on hand in due time to transport the sailing-party, lunch and all.

Mrs. Wood had taken especial pains in the preparation of the lunch, and even Zeb Fuller would have been compelled to admit that there was nothing "ghostly" about it.

There was a funny sort of smile on Mrs. Dryer's face when that span of horses was pulled up in front of the Doctor's residence, but she had no other use for it than to keep it in its proper place, above her teeth, till Effie had taken her seat beside George Brayton and the "baroosh" disappeared beyond the trees of the village green.

Then, indeed, her learned husband was glad enough to plead several engagements with the

Academy trustees and hurry away to keep them.

Prompt as had been the departure of Bar and Val and their friends, Zebedee Fuller and his faithful cronies had the start of them and were already tempting the perch and pickerel, when the "baroosh" came to a standstill in front of the somewhat heterogeneous home of Puff Evans.

"It's all right," said Puff to Bar. "She's ready, name and all. There's heaps of bait under the seat and it's a right down good day for fishin'. Only there may be squalls."

"Squalls?"

The word lingered in Bar Vernon's ear for a moment, but just then Effie Dryer exclaimed:

"There she is. The prettiest boat on all Skanigo!"

"Why, so she is," replied Sibyl, "a very pretty boat, indeed. What's her name, Mr. Vernon?"

"Name?" repeated Bar, as the color began to climb up across his face.

"There it is," exclaimed Effie, "painted on the stern. Can't you read? S-i-b-b-l-e, Sibble. Why, what a queer name. Did Puff name her?"

"I should say he had," exclaimed George Bray-

ton, as he burst into a roar of laughter. "Don't you see, Sibyl? She's named after you. Only a few letters out of the way, that's all."

Poor Bar!

Puff was attending to something else just then, and Val Manning stood just where he could poke his elbow into Bar's ribs without being noticed.

As for Sibyl Brayton, she did not seem to see where the fun came in, but stepped right forward into the boat, like a brave and good girl as she was. Even Effie Dryer followed her with a face that was all one twinkle, but that did not let a single laugh get loose.

There was need of at least one term at the Academy for Puff Evans, that was clear, and Bar was glad enough to busy himself with the fishing-tackle.

His intended compliment had become a thing to be hidden from Zebedee Fuller, lest it should be carved on half the loose boards of Ogleport.

There were only five of them, and the trim little craft did not seem to care a fig for a lighter load, as she danced away on the blue waves of Skanigo.

George Brayton himself was a very good hand with a boat and he handled the graceful little

Sibyl in a way that made her passengers forget how very badly her name had been spelled for her.

Miles and miles away, up the lake, sped the gay-hearted cruisers, right past the spot where Zeb Fuller and his friends were steadily pulling in their victims, until they reached a land-locked sort of bay which Puff had indicated as a "sure thing for good fishin'!"

Here, indeed, the sail came down and the anchor was thrown over, and Effie Dryer altogether forgot her stepmother in the unwonted excitement of watching for nibbles.

The nibbles came, too, plenty of them, and Val Manning earned a new title to his chum's devotion by the forbearance with which he allowed Bar not only to bait Sibyl Brayton's hook, but to take off and consign to the "fish-car" for her every finny fellow who was reckless enough to bite hard and stay on in spite of her unskilful management of her line.

Effie Dryer had been on the lake many a time before, and had a very good opinion of her own skill, but she was somehow contented to allow George Brayton to follow the example Bar Vernon set him.

Fishing is sure to become tiresome in due time, however, even if the biting is liberal, and before noon all hands were ready to see the sail hoisted again.

Then there was a "voyage of discovery" up and down the rugged line of the lake shore, to find a suitable place for their picnic.

Plenty of them there were, but it would not do to throw away the fun of choosing, and at last they pitched upon a spot, at the head of a deep cove, shadowed by great rocks and tall overhanging trees.

The *Sibyl* was hauled ashore; the girls were helped out; a blazing fire was kindled; coffee was made; the contents of Mrs. Wood's ample basket were brought to light; and then it was shortly discovered that the best thing in the world to secure a good appetite was to take a few hours of sailing and fishing on Skanigo.

It was at the end of the lunch that Val Manning once more covered his unselfish head with glory, for he volunteered to look out for the boat and the "things" while George Brayton and Bar Vernon took the young ladies for a stroll among the rocks and trees, and up and down the shore.

Splendid fun that was, but Bar Vernon was yet a good deal of a "boy," for one of the first things he said to his companion was :

"You mustn't think I didn't know how to spell your name. That was all Puff Evans's fault."

"Then you really did name your boat after me?" asked Sibyl.

"Of course I did," said Bar. "You are the only Sibyl I ever knew."

"It was very kind of you," she answered, gently; "and I think she is a beautiful little boat."

There was not a prouder fellow on or about Skanigo Lake at that moment, than Mr. Barnaby Vernon.

That sort of thing could not last forever, though it might be ever so pleasant, and Val Manning's self-imposed watch at the shore was shortly terminated.

It was not quite so warm or sunny just now, and if Puff Evans had been within speaking distance, it is very likely he would have spoken a word of warning, but the party in the boat had not the least idea in the world that any danger

to them could be lurking among the clouds and hills.

Perhaps there was not, indeed, for their only real danger was in their own ignorance and sense of security.

"Boys," Zeb Fuller had remarked a few minutes before, "there's a squall coming. We'd better pull up the lake. City folks are all fools, you know, and there's no telling what may happen to 'em."

Good for Zeb, only he came very near being too late, in spite of his wise forethought.

The *Sibyl*, with her precious freight, had danced away lively enough from the launching-place, but had scarcely made a mile before the wind seemed almost to die out, so Val Manning suggested to Bar that they had better take a turn at the oars.

"No," replied Bar, "there's more a-coming. Don't you see that dark-looking ripple out there?"

"Where?" asked Effie Dryer.

"There," said Bar, pointing with his finger, "and —"

"Here it comes!" exclaimed Brayton.

Come it did, indeed !

There was no time to bring the boat around to it—no time for the slightest precaution—no time for anything but a wild cry of fear from the two girls—and then all five of them were floundering in the mocking waters of Skanigo, while their beauty of a boat lay capsized and useless beside them.

Half a mile from shore, and no life-preservers !

It was a good thing that the male members of that party could all swim well.

“Look out for Miss Dryer,” shouted Bar to George Brayton ; “I’ll keep Sibyl up. Val, try to right the boat.”

George Brayton had felt a great pain at his heart the moment before, but Bar’s words seemed to take it right away.

“Can you keep her up?” he anxiously inquired.

“Yes, George,” said Sibyl herself, “and he’s brought me an oar. You take care of Effie.”

That was quite enough for one man to do, though Effie met the emergency very courageously ; but she could not swim a stroke, and the water was becoming a trifle rough.

Val Manning had, at first, come very near being entangled with the boat, and even now he could hardly understand how it was that his friends had come to the surface and "paired off" so very nicely.

It may be because they had been sitting together and so have gone overboard in company.

At all events, he saw that the most important duty of all had fallen on his own shoulders, and he set about it like a hero.

"Cut the halyards," shouted Bar, "and let the sail come down. You'll never right her without that."

Val obeyed, for the heavy, water-soaked sail had toppled clean over upon him the first time he tipped up the boat, knocking him under the water.

Relieved of this impediment, it was not so very difficult to get the boat once more on an "even keel," or to swim around and pick up the floating oars, but whatever of her cargo which could not float or swim was already at the bottom of the Skanigo.

"Her gunwale is only an inch or so above the

surface," exclaimed Val. "I don't see how we are ever to bail her."

There was a terrible whiteness on George Brayton's face just then, and Effie Dryer must have seen it, for she said to him in a low voice, "I understand. You must leave me and swim ashore. You must save yourself."

"Never!" he hoarsely replied, but it was a dark moment in the life of George Brayton.

Just then, however, Bar Vernon caught hold of a piece of wood that floated past him.

"Here's the rudder, Sibyl," he exclaimed. "Now put that and the oar under your chin. Are you brave enough to float on that? It'll keep your head above water while I go and help Val."

"I'll do anything," she answered. "Don't be afraid about me."

A rare girl was Sibyl Brayton, and in a moment more Bar came swimming to the side of George Brayton with another oar and one of the movable boat-seats.

"There," he said, "that'll help you keep her up. Val and I will bail out the boat."

Nothing but their hats, indeed, to start with,

though the water was not so rough now. Still the waves would splash over in, and their work seemed almost hopeless. One inch. Then another!

If their strength and that of George Brayton and the girls would only hold out!

"Bar," exclaimed Val, "try and get over the stern without upsetting her."

"You try it," said Bar; "you're lighter than I am."

It was a perilous experiment, for it endangered all they had thus far gained, but in a minute or so more Val Manning was in the boat and bailing for dear life.

Bar turned, every now and then, for a look at his other friends.

Sibyl's face was pale, but she was steadily obeying his injunction "not to try to keep too much of her above water."

George Brayton was doing all a man could do, but it was evident that he was fast becoming fatigued, while Effie Dryer seemed almost afraid to look at him.

"If I can only get in and help Val," groaned Bar.

But just then, sweeter than the sweetest music Bar had ever heard in his life, a chorus of wild yells from boyish throats came to his ears across the water, and around the nearest point of land he saw the great, clumsy, scow-built punt which Zeb Fuller and his friends had borrowed for their day's fishing coming on at as great a resemblance to speed as her crew of excited boys could give her.

"Overboard, all of them!" had been Zeb's exclamation, as the scene of the disaster opened upon him. "Pull, boys, pull! No time now for remarks."

Pull they did like good fellows, only it seemed to them very much as if the heavy old scow were anchored.

"Courage!" shouted Bar to Sibyl; "there's help coming."

"Courage, Effie," murmured George Brayton.

"And you, too," she said, in reply. "Oh, you must keep up! For my sake!"

"For yours? Then, indeed, I will."

They needed whatever encouragement and strength they could get all around before the punt arrived, but then Zeb Fuller and Hy Allen

seemed to make nothing at all of pulling in the girls, one after the other. In fact, Brayton was compelled to say :

“Gently, now, boys,” more than once, by way of moderating their somewhat headlong strength and eagerness.

Bar had been on hand to help, but now he swam back to the *Sibyl* and clambered in.

That unlucky craft was beginning to be a little less water-logged, and Zeb Fuller tossed over a big, rusty tin basin, with the aid of which the work went on tenfold more rapidly.

“Saved, thank God !” exclaimed George Brayton, as he sank, dripping and exhausted, on a seat of the punt, opposite to Effie and his sister.

Neither of them said a word aloud, but there was no doubt they were saying the same thing in their hearts.

“Those two brave boys, too,” said Effie, a moment later. “I scarcely know how we are to thank them.”

“And Zeb and his friends,” began George Brayton, but that young worthy interrupted him with :

“No thanks, please, Mr. Brayton. It’s an

every-day matter with us. We get our pocket money by it. If the man's drowned we charge only a dime, but if we get him ashore alive, it's twenty-five cents. We've done lots of harm that way."

"Harm?" exclaimed Sibyl.

"Yes, indeed," said Zeb, gravely, "but then it's so hard to decide, on the spur of the moment, whether we ought to let a man drown or not. I fear we are influenced too much by the odd fifteen cents."

Worn out as he was by his long struggle in the water, Brayton was forced to laugh at Zeb's way of avoiding unwelcome gratitude, and Effie Dryer's face half lost the expression of deep, sweet thoughtfulness it had worn ever since she came out of the water. As for Sibyl, she was intently watching Bar and Val at their work, which was now nearly completed.

In a few moments the *Sibyl* was once more in sailing trim and the picnic party could abandon the slow safety of the punt and start for home.

CHAPTER XXVIII

TWO IMPORTANT TELEGRAMS

THE results of that boating excursion were nothing short of "nuts and honey" to Mrs. Dr. Dryer. Never in all her life had she been blessed with so magnificent an opportunity to say: "I told you so!"

She said it, too, very abundantly, and what puzzled her, as well as took away half the sweetness of her triumph, was the fact that her unsubmitive stepdaughter did not seem to be in the slightest degree cast down about it.

In fact, no sooner had Effie put on dry clothing than she seemed to look back upon her day of danger and disaster as one whose happiness had been absolutely without a cloud.

She praised the drive, the sail, the lunch, the boys; she even expressed a decided liking for a compulsory bath in Skanigo. And then she put on an obstinate fit of silence and refused to say another word about it.

The rest of the population of Ogleport required further time and more accurate information.

Their first vague impressions had been to the effect that Zebedee Fuller had swum, five separate times, half the width of Skanigo, each time bringing back with him a half-drowned man or woman, and that then he had gone again and towed home the boat.

There were manifest flaws in that narrative, however, and little by little the truth was presented and accepted; but even then Zeb remained a hero, as usual.

Somewhat different was the state of Mrs. Brayton's mind after hearing Sibyl's account of her adventure, and who shall blame her if, right at the supper-table and before they had a chance to sit down, the good motherly, excited lady half-weeping gave to Bar Vernon and Val Manning a dozen grateful kisses?

Hysterical?

Say it for yourself, then!

The boys hardly thought they had deserved so much, but when a mother has come so very near losing her only daughter, she has a right to express her feelings in any way she chooses.

Perhaps, if Sibyl had been consulted, she might have remarked that Val came in for an even share with Bar, when the latter was clearly entitled to a majority.

The thought of rectifying the matter did not enter her head, doubtless, but she felt all the more kindly disposed towards her handsome and somewhat mysterious young preserver.

The next day was Sunday, and the only telegraph office of Ogleport was not open, except for an hour or so in the morning, like the post-office.

The churches were, however, and they were all full, especially the one in which Mrs. Wood had her pew, and many were the curious glances directed at her array of remarkable "boarders."

Even the members of the Dorcas Society were compelled to admit that Mrs. Brayton and her daughter were "nice," while it was well for her son and his two young pupils that their vanity was spared the golden opinions heaped upon their manly heads.

Very early on Monday, however, there were two telegrams brought by the "messenger" to the house of Mrs. Wood. One was for George

Brayton. He, however, had no knowledge of the other.

It found him very busy over a letter that he had taken from that morning's mail, and which was signed "Ashbel Norton."

The letter and the telegram, were both read to his mother and sister, and the former said :

"Well, George, this is as good a place as any. We will wait here till you return."

It was likely Mrs. Dryer would have another opportunity to say: "I told you so."

The first thing that George Brayton had to say to the principal, when he met him in the Academy chapel, was to announce that he had been summoned out of town and might be gone for several days.

"I do not see how I shall be able to spare you at present," remarked the Doctor, coldly, and Zeb Fuller would have noted the disuse of long words.

"It is imperative," said Brayton. "I cannot help myself."

"But what will the trustees say to such a dereliction?" asked the Doctor.

"I don't know that I care much," was the

somewhat nettled reply; "but as they are fair and right-minded men, they will doubtless approve my going."

Here was something for Mrs. Dryer; but the Doctor was not the man to face so decided an answer, and he turned the subject with:

"But where is your young friend, Mr. Vernon? Manning is over yonder, in his proper place."

"Vernon?" said Brayton. "Isn't he here? That's strange. Well, he'll turn up. I'm exceedingly sorry, Dr. Dryer, but this is a matter which may involve a large sum of money. I must take the next stage."

There was really no help for it, but it might have interested George Brayton if he had known that Bar, with a "traveling bag," which he had ready packed for days, had waited, his telegram in his pocket, just below Runner's tavern that morning, and had taken the early stage from the North without losing time in making arrangements with Dr. Dryer.

The driver of the coach had no unnecessary scruples. To him it was only one more passenger, whether he picked him up at the proper

place or not, and Bar was miles away from Ogleport by the time his absence was known to any one but the faithful Val.

The latter, indeed, was in every bit as excited a state of mind as when he was bailing out the boat the previous Saturday, and he kept as cool and steady an exterior now as then, like the "trump" that he was.

Now it happened that when George Brayton walked away from the Academy, he caught sight of a female form some distance ahead of him, walking steadily away down the street.

"Ah!" he said to himself, "Mrs. Dryer."

Precisely. No other.

And yet the young man made no manner of effort to overtake her, but turned his footsteps, instead, directly across the green, towards the home she had left behind her.

It was a safe sort of calculation to make, for Euphemia was there—and no one else besides.

Considering how nearly they had come to being drowned together on Saturday, it was in every way natural and polite that George Brayton should wish to make her a farewell call before hurrying away out of town on Monday.

Still, it is likely the doctor's wife would have given something to have been present at that interview.

It might have been interesting even to good Mrs. Brayton herself.

It certainly was to George and Effie, and the former went on to Mrs. Wood's afterwards, with a stronger feeling than ever that he cared very little indeed whether school kept or not. Alas, for Effie Dryer's peace!

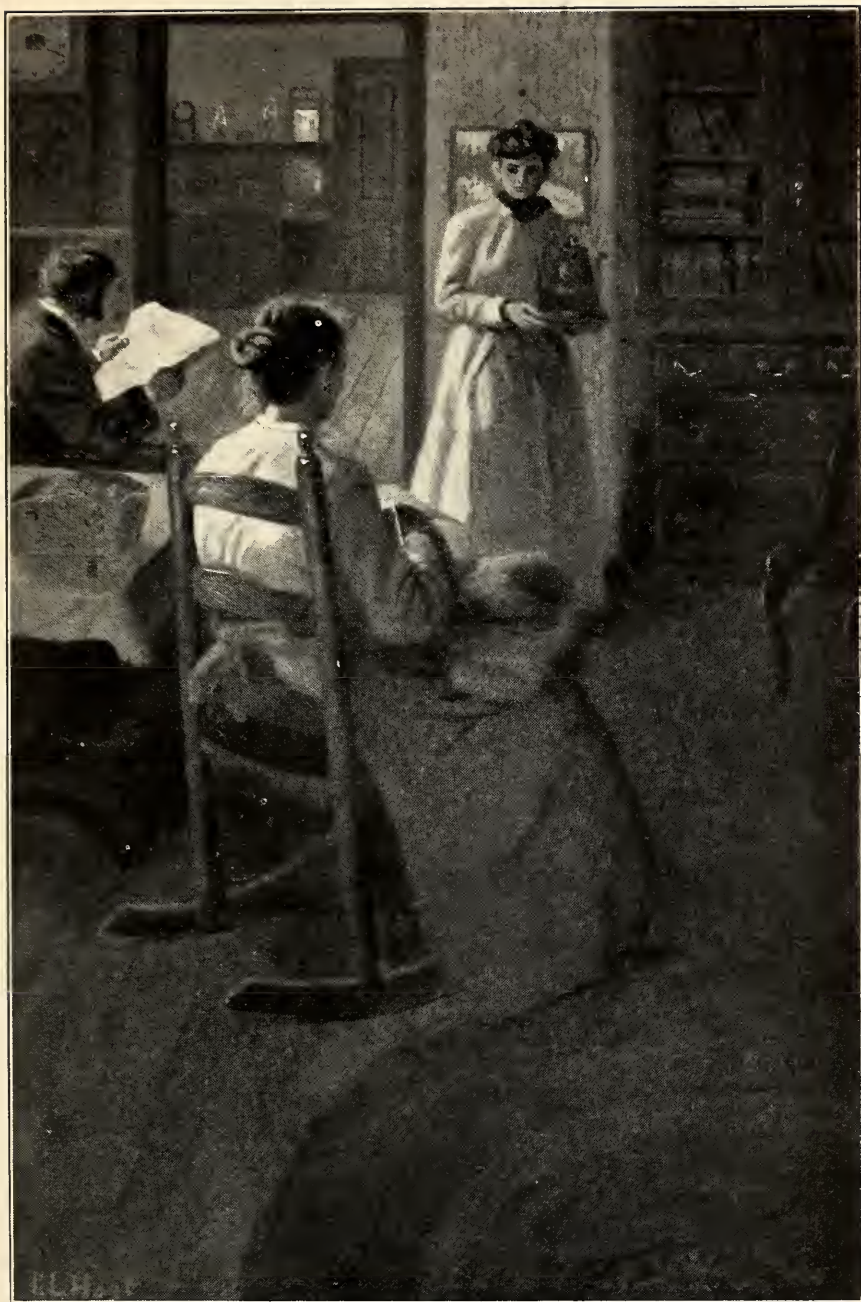
No human eyes had noticed George Brayton's entry of her father's front door, but a very human pair had seen him go away. After that, it only needed that the cup should be filled with the news the Doctor himself brought home at the noon "recess."

"Euphemia!" almost frantically exclaimed Mrs. Dryer, "he is going. Do you mean to say that you are going with him?"

"Not now," calmly responded Effie, but with an extra flush on her face.

"Not now? What do you mean? Why not now?" demanded her stepmother.

"Because he forgot to ask me," said Effie, demurely.



“ BECAUSE HE FORGOT TO ASK ME ”

"Do you mean you would if he did?"

"If he ever does, I shall tell him, but I've no intention of telling you, now or then," said Effie, firmly.

"Dorothy Jane," said the Doctor, with a narrow escape from being very sensible, for once, "it occurs to me that Euphemia only displays a suitable degree of feminine reserve and delicacy."

"Feminine fiddlesticks," replied his third. "This is what comes of chemical apparatuses, and buggy-riding, and walks, and talks, and upsets in the lake. I hope he'll never come back, I do. Are his mother and sister going with him?"

"I believe not," said Effie. "There's the stage, now; you can look out of the window and see for yourself."

Mrs. Dryer acted instantly on Effie's suggestion, but the latter stepped as quickly to the front door, and it was not in defiance of "Dorothy Jane" that the white signal waved so gay a farewell from the window of the departing stage-coach. And Dr. Dryer went back to his duties that afternoon, with a dim idea that the schoolroom was a sort of refuge, after all, in spite of Zebedee Fuller.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE BLACK VALISE IS OPENED

WHEN Mr. Ashbel Norton called on Judge Danvers, according to appointment, that Monday morning, he found the old lawyer alone in his private office, with a small, black leather valise lying on the table before him.

“Good-morning, Mr. Norton,” he said to his visitor. “Do you recognize this at all?”

“Perfectly well,” replied Norton. “I have seen it a hundred times.”

“When and where?”

“In the hands of my brother-in-law, at his house, years ago. I could scarcely say how often. He kept many of his papers in it, often matters of value. It was a handy thing to carry to and from his banking-house, or to put away and lock up anywhere.”

“It is part of the property, then, of which you came in search?”

“Assuredly. I should certainly claim it if it were not already in your own custody.”

"I shall then proceed to take the responsibility of opening it," said the Judge, as he touched his little bell; "but I must have witnesses."

In a moment more, two law-clerks were called in as "lookers-on," while another sat at a desk and wrote out an inventory of the various papers and matters in the valise, as the Judge called them off.

"No money," he said, at last.

"Of course not," replied Mr. Norton; "we could trust Robert for that. Nor anything he could handily turn into money. That is the will, beyond doubt, and it has evidently been opened and read."

"No harm for us to read it over again, then," said the Judge. "I'll excuse you now, gentlemen."

The moment they were alone, the Judge proceeded with a perusal of the ancient-looking document, while Ashbel Norton listened.

"It is marvelous!" exclaimed the latter, at the close, "how nearly my poor sister seems to have recalled every word of it. It was made originally with her sanction and approval, and she has obeyed it as far as was possible, under

the circumstances. It will now greatly aid us in carrying into effect the terms of her own."

"The property seems to have been large," remarked the Judge.

"Quite so," said Norton, "and almost all of it in available shape—stocks, bonds and the like. Very little real estate. My sister had been well provided for, so that she was never cramped, you know, or anything of that sort. Still, the whole thing was a dreadful blow to her."

"I should say it would have been," remarked the Judge. "But did you never, until now, have any idea in what direction your brother had gone?"

"To be sure we did," replied Norton, "and that was the worst of it. We heard from him, or thought we did, on the Continent, in the Colonies, in India, everywhere. We spent a mint of money in searches. This last hint, you know, came from himself. He thought, perhaps, he might get something out of us."

"And now what shall we do with him?" asked the Judge.

"The very thing that puzzles me!" exclaimed Norton. "There'll be nobody to dispute the

will, now it's found. Indeed there could hardly be any dispute about it. But we don't want any row made or public notoriety. We've suffered enough. All I want of him is to tell us when my nephew died, if he's dead, or where he is if he's alive."

"We will easily make him do that," replied the Judge, "and then he's done enough in this country to have him put out of the way for years, if we wanted to, but I've no malice against him."

"Nor I, indeed," said Norton. "Even my poor sister forgave him, and she'd suffered more than any one else, unless it may be his own wife, poor thing!"

Things looked pretty black for Major Montague, or Major Robert Norton, it must be confessed, for the longer the lawyer talked with his English client the clearer it became that there remained little enough of power, either for good or evil, in the wretched man who had done so much of the latter.

There he sat in his cell that day, nevertheless, scheming and calculating and plotting for all the world as if he really had what he called "a

hold" upon old Judge Danvers. If he expected to be sent for at once, however, he was very much mistaken.

Indeed, just as the Judge was about to start for home that night, a sharp, alert, wiry-looking little gentleman stepped into his office.

"Glad to see you, Mr. District Attorney," said the lawyer. "What can I do for you?"

"I see you have put that fellow Montague in quod again. Want him for anything?"

"Witness, perhaps, for a few days. Why?"

"Oh! that's all right. I won't interfere till you're through with him. Want him myself after that. Been looking for him this long time, only I didn't know he was the man till to-day."

"Bad case?"

"Rather, I should say. Forgery, swindling, pocket-picking, all sorts. I hardly know what's on the list. Pretty much everything. Spoil him for a witness."

"Hold on a bit, then," said the Judge; "I'll turn him right over to you."

"All right," replied the District Attorney. "I'm always glad to oblige a man like you. He's a bad one. Good-day."

“Mr. Ashbel Norton need have no fears about his family name,” muttered the Judge; “but how about all the Montagues? Their name’s going to the penitentiary by a large majority.”

There seemed no help for it, and it was not any fault of Judge Danvers, either.

That evening he had another long talk with Dr. Manning, which was ended with :

“Of course, he’ll come right here. Send him down to my office with as little delay as possible. I must have a talk with him before anybody else knows that I’ve found him.”

Perhaps, after all, there was small need of so many precautions, but the old lawyer could hardly have done his work in any other way if he had tried.

As for Bar Vernon, it had seemed to him that morning as if there never could have been so slow a stage-coach anywhere else in all the world, and he caught himself glancing enviously at the telegraph wires. He had secured a perch beside the driver on the box, and at last he asked him :

“What’s the matter with your horses to-day? They seem to go like snails.”

“Snails, is it?” angrily exclaimed the driver.

"S'pose you ask 'em ? I reckon I know how fast hosses ort to be druv."

"Hullo, you off nag," suddenly inquired Bar, as the driver had suggested, "is that the best you can do ?"

"Best I can do," returned the off horse, with a toss of his head.

"Golly !" exclaimed the driver.

"What's the matter ?" again demanded Bar.

"Low feed," replied the animal, or at least so it seemed to the driver, and again he exclaimed :

"Golly !" and added a long whistle of utter astonishment.

"What do they give you ?" asked Bar.

"Shingle nails and lager beer," dolefully returned the now clearly harassed animal. "Don't bother me !"

"Think of it !" exclaimed Bar. "No wonder he can't travel fast on such feed as that. I can see 'em sticking through him, now. Poor fellow."

"Poor fellow, yourself," stammered the driver. "Look a-here, young man, who be you ?"

"Who am I ?" replied Bar. "Why, I'm half horse, myself, on my aunt's side, and her right

hand side at that. You don't think they'd tell me any lies, do you?"

"They did, though," replied the driver, who had edged away as far as the seat would let him.

Men of his class are not likely to be lacking in "cuteness," however, and it was not long before the truth began to dawn on him.

"Sold," he said, musingly. "Jeff Rogers sold by a runaway schoolboy. Sold on hoss talk, too. Who'd ha' thought of sech a thing? But then, how well he does it! Beats the perfessionals all holler."

At all events, it helped a good deal to while away the time till Bar was able to exchange the slow-moving coach for the swiftness and comfort of the railway express train which was to carry him on towards the city.

Little did Bar imagine what was or might be waiting for him on his arrival, although he "imagined" at the liveliest kind of rate.

Trust a boy for that sort of thing.

Even the lightning express train, at last, began to seem as if it must have been kept for awhile on some kind of "low feed."

Nothing short of a trip by telegraph would

have really answered the requirements of Bar's very natural impatience.

Small blame to him, therefore, if he mystified a whole car-load of passengers by the questions he asked and the answers he obtained from poor fellows who were stealing rides under the floor and out upon the roof of the car.

He couldn't help it, you know.

CHAPTER XXX

THE ACADEMY "GHOST" DISCOVERED

IF Bar himself had passed that day in a state of ill-suppressed excitement, he had left a very volcanic state of things behind him.

Before matters at the Academy had a fair chance to settle into their customary routine, the news had passed swiftly from desk to desk and bench to bench, whispered, penciled, chalked, everything but telegraphed or shouted, that "Bar Vernon's run away," and this was speedily followed by, "Mr. Brayton's gone after him."

By the time the scholars were let out for the noon "recess," the same messages, in various shapes and forms, had made the swift circle of Ogleport, and more than one boy found himself confronted, at corners of the green, by a more or less matronly inquisitor, anxious to "know about it all."

It was surprising, too, very much so, what clear and circumstantial statements of the facts

those boys were prepared to give, but if any one among them faltered in his tale, that one was not named Zebedee Fuller.

The amount of "faith" afloat in Ogleport was quite likely to be all called for whenever the different inquirers at Zeb's mouth should come to compare notes.

"Val," he dolefully exclaimed, as he encountered that young gentleman, "you've got to help me out of this."

"Out of what?" said Val.

"Why, Bar hasn't run away and George isn't after him, but what am I to say about it?"

"Keep it up," said Val.

"Keep what up?"

"Why, Bar is off!"

"Bar off? You don't mean to say he's cut it for good?" was Zebedee's almost breathless response.

"Can't say about that," said Val. "All I know is that he went away this morning, and may be gone some days, if not longer. There's a secret in it."

"Is there?" said Zeb. "That's a great comfort. You won't tell old Sol, will you?"

The Academy "Ghost" Discovered 361

"Tell him what?"

"Why, the secret."

"Oh, I don't know it myself, and I ain't half sure that Bar does. He's gone after it."

"And George, too, he must have a secret," groaned Zeb. "I think I must tell Dorothy Jane to keep a sharp eye on Euphemia. Val Manning, it'll be a bad thing for Ogleport to lose Bar Vernon just now."

"Hang Ogleport!" exclaimed Val. "Think of me!"

"Yes," said Zeb, with a look of deep sympathy out of his left eye, "your case is a hard one. Val, don't you think the wind is rising a little?"

"Seems so," said Val.

"And a bit westerly?"

"More and more west."

"Val, the Academy ought to have a chance to express its grief over the loss of Bar Vernon. You and I had better go and carry the sad news to the old bell."

Val felt as if that sort of thing would give his mind just the relief he needed, and by the time the bell had finished its midday work of

recalling the boys to their studies, its last duty for the day, the "van" in the western gap of the steeple had been securely hitched to the tolling gear, and two agile forms were creeping downstairs as lightly and silently as cats.

"The wind will be higher towards night," said Zeb to his friend, "but there's no telling when the bell may begin to express his feelings."

Nevertheless, they both returned to their desks and duties with a truly wonderful degree of firmness, sticking bravely to their books in spite of more than one ominous wave of grating sound which came creeping down upon them from the bell-tower.

There was that upon Dr. Dryer's mind that day, which so absorbed it that no ordinary interruption would have sufficed to secure his attention.

Indeed, never in all their experience of him had his pupils been so puzzled to get at the meaning of his "explanations," while he once so far wandered from an exact use of terms as to address Hy Allen as "Euphemia."

Hiram was afterwards compelled to thrash half a dozen small boys and one large one before he

The Academy "Ghost" Discovered 363

could deliver himself from the consequences of that slip of the tongue.

Hiram would rather have died than have submitted to being called Euphemia Allen, or even "Effie," much as he doubtless admired the Doctor's pretty daughter.

School was out at last, however, and Zebedee Fuller led the way to the mill-dam for the accustomed swim.

He found Gershom Todderley and Patrick Murphy strolling about outside the mill, in a way which plainly indicated their readiness to listen to any kind of news from "up-town."

Nor were they by any means disappointed either as to quantity or quality, for Zeb relieved Val Manning of all necessity for answering questions.

"Hark!" suddenly exclaimed Pat. "Hear that, now! Begorra, that's the bill bruk loose again!"

"Ah, yes, the bell!" sighed Zeb. "Somebody has told the old fellow about George Brayton and Bar Vernon."

"That's what it's towled for?" asked Pat.

"Yes, Patrick," said Zeb. "Do you s'pose it told itself?"

"That's what it's doin' the noo," exclaimed Pat. "It's ownly a praste can do anythin' right for that same bill."

"That's my opinion," said Zeb, solemnly. "Those ghosts from Mrs. Wood's are at it in broad daylight. What are we coming to?"

If the wind had been a steady one there is really no telling what the result might have been, but the lulls were so frequent and so prolonged that the intervals of silence became more difficult to comprehend than even the sudden outbreaks of half-tipsy tolling.

"Come, Val," said Zeb, as he and the boys cut short their watery fun and began to dress themselves. "It's time we were on hand at the Academy. They're pretty sure to get at it this time, and I'm almost sorry we set it a-going."

Stronger and stronger blew the western blast, as the boys marched up the street and across the green, and wilder and more protracted were the bell's expressions of its sorrow for the loss of Bar Vernon.

"Quite a crowd of mourners, I declare," re-

The Academy "Ghost" Discovered 365

marked Zeb, as he pointed to the assemblage on the Academy steps and scattered over the green before it. "The bell has done well."

A few minutes later, however, there was indeed a commotion.

There were more than a few of the female population of Ogleport whose curiosity had brought them out upon the green, just when they should have been at home getting supper ready; but now, out from the Academy door, followed in dubious silence by her husband, strode the triumphant spouse of Dr. Dryer.

"There!" she exclaimed, as she pitched Bar Vernon's invention down upon the grass, "it was that thing did it. All it needed was a woman to find it out. That's your ghost. Now, Dr. Dryer, I'd like you to find out who put it up there. Zebedee Fuller, come here!"

Zeb promptly responded, with Val at his side, and there were auditors in almost uncomfortable abundance.

"There, sir," demanded Mrs. Dryer, pointing to the wreck of the van, "did you ever see that before?"

"That?" responded Zeb. "Everybody knows what that is, I hope."

"What is it, then?" exclaimed the Doctor, incautiously, and Zeb's face was all aghast with amazement at such a display of ignorance in such a man, as he respectfully replied:

"That, Dr. Dryer, is a philosophical apparatus for measuring the strength of the wind."

"Zebedee!" exclaimed Mrs. Dryer.

"Strength of the wind?" said her husband.

"Yes, Doctor," continued Zeb; "the harder the wind should blow the louder the bell would toll. I have no doubt of it. Still, I should prefer to have Mr. Brayton explain it to you, as my own information is limited."

"Brayton?" cried the triumphant lady. "I told you so. Don't you remember? He was up there every time. Of course it was Brayton. He and that Vernon boy knew all about it. No wonder they ran away together. I told you so! Come, Dr. Dryer, we had better go home."

"Hot water for George when he gets back, I'm afraid, if not for Barnaby," muttered Zeb; "but the bell don't seem to feel as bad as it did. Come on, Val."

The two were walking rapidly away across the green when they were again halted by a softer voice than that of Mrs. Dryer.

"Zeb Fuller, what did you mean by laying that to Mr. Brayton?"

"I didn't do anything of the kind," replied Zeb; "it was Dorothy."

"But you let her think so."

"I?" exclaimed Zeb. "I never touched her. Euphemia, George is as innocent of that bell business as you or I."

Effie burst out into a merry peal of laughter over Zeb's response and the manner of it, but there were other curious questioners drawing near, and she hurried away.

Away from that spot, indeed, but her father's house did not come to Effie's mind just then, as the pleasantest place of refuge in the world, and, instead of seeking that shelter, she turned her footsteps towards Mrs. Wood's for a bit of a chat with Sibyl.

A very excellent choice, but why should Effie Dryer have blushed so deeply, when Sibyl's mother met her in the hall and put her soft arms

around her and gave her such a sweet and motherly kiss?

So very different was that kiss from any that Effie had received from her father's third wife.

CHAPTER XXXI

GOOD NEWS FOR BAR

WHEN George Brayton arrived in the great city that Tuesday morning, he went directly to the hotel designated by Ashbel Norton's telegram, and neither one of them had the slightest suspicion that an earlier train had brought a more important passenger.

The Englishman had a good deal to tell Brayton, of course, but it was nothing compared to Dr. Manning's talk with Bar Vernon, at an earlier hour, before he sent him down to the office of Judge Danvers.

Poor Bar!

If his brain had been busy during his journey, it was all in a whirl now, and the only real help he got was when good, sweet-faced Mrs. Manning put her arm around him and said, as if she could not help it:

"Oh, if they had but found you before your mother died!"

That was just what Bar needed, for it brought the tears to his eyes, and there is nothing else in all the world so good as a few tears at the right time and place.

By the time Bar reached the law-office, therefore, he was as clear-headed and ready-witted as the Judge himself could have asked for, and the latter confessed his surprise at the way his young friend comprehended every point of the story, and at the really important things he was able to bring to light from his "old time" memory.

"There will be no difficulty whatever," exclaimed the Judge. "Indeed, I do not imagine Mr. Norton, or those he represents, will attempt to make any. I never saw a case more entirely clear of doubt."

"It's all like a dream," said Bar, "but I suppose it's true."

"True enough," said the Judge. "Now go and get a lunch, for you must be tired enough, with all these papers. By the time you get back, I think, the rest will be here."

Barnaby was glad enough to get a bit of sunlight and a breath of fresh air, not to speak of

coffee and oysters, although the latter were by no means unwelcome.

When he returned to the law-office, however, he passed through the outer rooms, to Judge Danvers's own private door, with a heart which beat more and more briskly at every step.

He put his hand upon the latch, but the door seemed almost to swing open of itself, and then, as he entered, a tall figure sprang from an opposite chair and a well-known voice exclaimed :

“Bar Vernon ! You here ?”

“Mr. Brayton ? You ?” returned the no less astonished Barnaby ; but still another gentleman was on his feet, and the voice of Judge Danvers broke in with :

“Mr. Ashbel Norton, let me make you acquainted with your nephew, Barnaby Vernon ; Bar, my boy, this is your uncle, your mother's brother, of whom I told you.”

Barnaby and Mr. Norton were now standing, their hands tightly grasped, gazing in each other's faces, and the latter said, in a steady, deliberate voice :

“Judge Danvers, there isn't the shadow of a doubt. He's the very image of his father. Every

member of the Norton family will swear to him on sight. He hardly needs the papers."

"But he has them!" exclaimed the Judge. "It was from his own hands that I received them, when he engaged me as his counsel. Your brother Robert has also repeatedly acknowledged him as his nephew, Barnaby Vernon."

"Please don't speak of him again, Judge," said Mr. Norton, sadly. "We shall not trouble him for his declaration in this matter. You are my nephew's counsel. May I ask who has acted as his guardian?"

"Dr. Randall Manning, one of our most distinguished and wealthy physicians. He sent him to an academy at Ogleport, in this State, and Barnaby came from there this morning by telegraph."

"I wish I had," remarked Bar, "instead of by that slow old stage-coach and that railway train."

"Fact!" exclaimed the Judge. "I believe I'm getting excited. Anyhow, Mr. Norton, your nephew is in excellent hands, and I may say we are all deeply interested in his fortune."

"Please include me in that list," interposed

George Brayton. "I owe Bar about as much as one man can owe another."

"How is that?" asked Norton.

"How?" said George. "Why, he saved my sister's life last Saturday, and, I think likely, all the rest of our party, by his coolness and courage and good conduct. I'll tell you all about it some day. All I want to say now, Mr. Norton, is that not only you find your nephew in good company, but he's a relative any man may be proud to find."

Whatever of pecuniary loss or disappointment Bar Vernon's "discovery" was likely to bring to either of those two men, they seemed to be equally glad to find him, only Mr. Norton exclaimed:

"Poor Lydia! If she could only have lived till now!"

And then he added:

"Judge, I really don't care to see Robert again, and yet I can't bear to do anything against him. He is my brother, after all."

"Make yourself easy on that score," said the Judge. "The District Attorney called upon me last night, with reference to a man named Mon-

tague, and I think we need say no more on that head."

"And yet," remarked Brayton, "it was somehow on his account that my own family are brought into this arrangement of the Vernon property, is it not?"

"Only as a sort of reparation," returned Norton. "Robert's wife, whose life he destroyed by his wickedness, was your mother's sister, and Barnaby's mother, my sister Lydia, was tenderly attached to her. The legacy you have in her will was her own to give, and was to have been doubled if this will of Bar's father came to light, so that property could be reached. My own legacy is in the same shape. If, however, we had found the Vernon will, and Barnaby had died before his mother, all the property would have been hers, and your share and mine would have been vastly increased. I'm glad enough, however, that he is alive to claim it, for I have abundance already, and enough of the Vernon estate comes to me by my sister's will as it is."

"And to me and mine, too, I should say," exclaimed Brayton. "We haven't a ray of legal claim to it, otherwise than by will."

"Then it seems," suddenly remarked Bar, "that I am an Englishman, after all."

"Scarcely that," said Mr. Norton, with a smile. "Your mother was an Englishwoman, but your father was a New Yorker, and you were born within three miles of where you are now sitting. You have to come over and pay your English relatives a visit, however, as well as to take possession of your property."

"That can be done for him," said Judge Danvers. "For my own part, I should strongly oppose removing him from school at present. I wish, Mr. Norton, you'd have a talk with Dr. Manning about that."

"Both he and yourself have a perfect right to be consulted," said the Englishman, heartily. "We owe you a great deal of consideration in this matter; Mr. Brayton, do I understand that young Vernon is actually under your care at Ogleport?"

"Exactly," said George, "and boarding in the same house. He has Dr. Manning's own son for a room-mate."

"Dr. Manning's own son!" exclaimed Norton. "Well, Judge Danvers, do you know, this is all

very remarkable? very gratifying? Considering the habits and character of my poor brother, you know we were almost afraid to find my nephew. Expected, of course, he'd be unfit for civilized society, and all that sort of thing. It's a very happy disappointment, I assure you."

"I should think it would be," said the Judge, with enthusiasm, "and it'll get better and better, the more you know him. Why, sir, I meant to make a lawyer of him."

"Perhaps you'll have a chance, yet," replied Norton; "but he may prefer something else when he grows up and has seen a little of the world."

"The world, indeed!" remarked Judge Danvers. "I'm not half sure but he's seen as much of the world as an average Englishman already."

Inasmuch as the important question of Bar Vernon's recognition by his relatives could now be safely regarded as settled, and his personal presence was hardly required for the transaction of mere "law business" between Judge Danvers and "the representative of the Vernon estate," Bar and George Brayton shortly left the lawyer's office for a walk and talk on their own account.

“And so,” said Brayton, “you and I are not even cousins, after all.”

“Queer kind of cousins,” said Bar, with a laugh, “but I am half sorry for it. I wish I could call your mother my aunt, you see. I wonder if I’ve any aunts over in England? I must ask Norton about that. How do you like him?”

“Very much,” said Brayton. “But do you mean to go to England with him?”

“Not by a good deal!” exclaimed Bar Vernon, with great energy. “Do you suppose I’d go over there, as ignorant as I now am, and let them all find it out? No, sir! I’ll study ten times harder than ever, till I feel I’ve nothing to be ashamed of.”

“That’s right,” said Brayton. “So you’d better go back to Ogleport with me and I’ll look out for your improvement.”

“But will you go on teaching school, now you’re so rich?”

“I shan’t be so very rich,” said Brayton, “and it’ll be months before I get hold of any of it. Besides, I’m under contract at the Academy, unless they let me off. By the way, when we

get back, I want you to keep this whole matter a profound secret."

"I will indeed," replied Bar.

CHAPTER XXXII

HOME AGAIN

MR. ASHBEL NORTON and Mr. George Brayton spent the evening of that day at Dr. Manning's, and the former had an excellent opportunity for getting better acquainted with his newfound nephew and the friends he had made.

The upshot of it all may be summed up, however, in the words of Judge Danvers :

"Well, Mr. Brayton," he said, "since you also are disposed to put your affairs in my hands, there is nothing for it but for me to prepare to go to England with Mr. Norton, on his return. Meantime, you had better take Barnaby back to his Greek and Latin and mathematics."

"We've been discussing that very thing," said Brayton, "and that is about our conclusion. For my own part, I do not feel justified in remaining away from my duties an hour longer than is necessary."

"I put the various law papers required in course of preparation, to-day," said the Judge, "and they will be ready for you to sign, so that you can leave the city to-morrow night. As for Bar, he is a minor yet, and all his business can be taken care of for him."

"I will answer for his family in England," remarked Ashbel Norton. "We are all entirely satisfied that things should take the shape you indicate. Only there is no need of haste, for, now I am over here, I'd like amazingly to see more of the country."

"You've all our splendid autumn weather before you for that," replied Dr. Manning. "There's no better time in all the year. I only wish I could leave my practice and go with you."

And so it was arranged, but Bar Vernon took the Judge aside before the evening was over, and said:

"But, Judge Danvers, how about Major Montague in all this? I've no malice against him, in spite of all he has done. He seemed always to have a sort of liking for me."

"Or for the money he meant to make out of

you, some day," replied the Judge. "When he stole you away, he thought he would be sure of a reward for sending you back again."

"Why didn't he, then?" asked Bar.

"Well, so far as I can understand it," said the Judge, "too many of his own misdeeds were coming to light about that time, and he was compelled to remain in hiding till things had blown over a little. Of course he kept you with him and took some kind of care of you. It was all pure selfishness. He seems to be a very bad man."

"But ought I not to see him?"

"Not now, I think. There is no danger but that we shall be able to find him any time we wish to. We will talk about it one of these days. All I want you to do now is to make a man of yourself as fast as you can. You've begun well, from all I can hear. Keep it up."

"I'll try," said Bar. "I think I've seen what some things lead to clearly enough."

"I should say you had," was the lawyer's very emphatic rejoinder.

But, while matters were going ahead so very

swimmingly in the great city, there were almost equally busy times in Ogleport.

Val Manning found himself invited, that day, to a private conference with Dr. Dryer. Not for any misdeeds of his own, as he was very carefully assured, but to ascertain what he might know as to the sudden disappearance of his room-mate.

"He did not tell me a word," said Val, "except that a telegram from his counsel called him back to the city. He could not say when he would return."

"His counsel? He's very young to have counsel. Do you mean Judge Danvers?"

"I suppose so," said Val.

Bar Vernon was growing rapidly to the stature of a very large boy, in the mind of the Academy principal, but he had unwisely, though, perhaps, necessarily, admitted his ruling half to that conference, and Mrs. Dryer broke in with:

"All an excuse, Dr. Dryer. I'm astonished that you allow yourself to be hoodwinked in that way."

"Dorothy Jane!"

"Don't speak to me!" she exclaimed. "Who was it found out all about the bell business? It's your duty to write at once to Dr. Manning."

"Yes," said Val, quietly. "I should be glad to have you do that."

But Mrs. Dryer had a good deal more to say, and she said it without missing a word, in spite of the Doctor's frequent attempts to interject ideas of his own.

At last, however, Val was released, to find Zebedee Fuller waiting for him at the gate, while Dr. Dryer was retained a close prisoner in his study until he had actually written that letter to Bar Vernon's "Guardian."

"I don't see what more we can do about it," said Zeb, as he and Val walked off towards the Academy, for it was at the noon recess. "The bell business has gone all to pieces."

"I'm half sorry for that," said Val. "It looks as if it would all have to come out one of these days."

"It certainly will," replied Zeb, "unless we can set the Ogleport people to thinking about something else. Even then it'll be hard to make

Dorothy let up on George. At all events, we mustn't allow him to suffer."

"He won't," said Val. "She can't do him a bit of hurt."

"Still," said Zeb, "I do wish we had Bar Vernon with us. The man that invented that bell business must be up to other things."

"Indeed he is," said Val; "but don't you be afraid. He'll turn up here again some fine morning."

"Sure of that?" exclaimed Zeb. "Then there's hope for the future of Ogleport yet. There comes old Sol."

That was a dismal day for the principal, however, and his several male and female subordinates had the "teaching" pretty much in their own hands, such as they were.

"Effie," said Sibyl Brayton to her friend, as they met on the green, a little before the close of school, "can you keep a secret?"

"Perfectly," said Effie. "Is it anything comical?"

"It isn't comical at all," said Sibyl. "We've just had a telegram from my brother George. He and Bar Vernon will be here to-morrow."

"He's caught him?" said Effie, hastily.

"Why, Effie!" exclaimed Sibyl, "Bar didn't go after George."

"But didn't George—I mean Mr. Brayton," said the blushing Effie, "go after Bar?"

"No," said Sibyl, "and it's all a puzzle to me. I don't understand a bit of it."

No more did Euphemia, but there were sharp eyes prepared to watch for the early stage from the South next day. They were duly rewarded, too, and George Brayton had plenty of time to tell his mother and sister the news, so that the latter could carry it over to Dr. Dryer's for Effie's benefit as soon as she had a good chance that afternoon.

As for George Brayton and Bar, they at once got rid of the dust of travel, and scarcely were the several rooms of the Academy filled, after the noon recess, before Val Manning's "chum" dropped quietly down into his accustomed seat beside him, while, at the same moment, the assistant-principal resumed the discharge of his own duties, for all the world as if he had not been gone ten minutes.

Dr. Dryer was in another room at the mo-

ment, and when he returned he started as if he had seen a ghost.

“Mr. Brayton?”

“Good-morning, Doctor. Back again, safe and sound, you see. Hope my absence has not occasioned any inconvenience.”

“The departure of even subordinate members of the faculty of this institution,” solemnly responded the principal, “can hardly fail to occasion approximate disturbances of its organization.”

“It’s all right,” muttered Zeb Fuller to himself, in his corner; “only he’ll choke himself with a big word yet, and then what’ll become of Dorothy?”

As for Brayton, he simply said:

“I’m sorry for that, of course, but it couldn’t be helped. Mr. Vernon returned with me.”

“With you?”

“Yes, with me. Had a very pleasant journey together. I met him in the city.”

“Mr. Brayton, may I see you after school? This matter seems to need looking into.”

“Certainly,” said George, as he prepared to go on with his classes, but Zebedee’s face fell.

"Short words, all of 'em," he soliloquized. "Must have learned them of Dorothy."

At another time George Brayton might have showed signs of rebellion, but he saw nothing very dreadful in the idea of going over to Dr. Dryer's house after school. It may, indeed, have been the very thing he would have asked for.

Bar Vernon attended rigidly to his duties that afternoon, but there was nothing to prevent him from using slate and pencil, and, before school was out, Val Manning had a very fair outline of all Bar had to tell him.

Then, indeed, the latter suddenly discovered what a lion he had become.

As Zeb announced to "the boys," not only had Bar returned safe and well, but "he has also distinguished himself by bringing back Mr. George Brayton with him. I could have done but little more myself."

At that very moment, however, the proposed "looking into" George Brayton's absence was beginning at the house of Dr. Dryer, and never before had the principal tried to look so large, or felt so really insecure about his actual size.

"Mr. Brayton," he began, "may I ask where your journey conveyed you?"

"City and back," said George, curtly. "Business errand, that's all."

"May I also venture to inquire as to the object of your journey?" asked the principal, with increasing dignity, while his wife smiled upon him her completest approbation, and Effie's blue eyes expanded with surprise and indignation.

"Certainly not," quietly responded Brayton, without the quiver of a nerve.

"You refuse a satisfactory response to my interrogation?" exclaimed the Doctor.

"Why," said George, "if it isn't satisfactory it ought to be. The business I went on was my own, not yours. I don't see why you should take any special interest in it."

"None of his business?" exclaimed Mrs. Dryer, aghast. "Is that the way you understand your duty to your superior? Perhaps you will say that this, too, is none of his business?"

With that the angry lady plucked from behind the sheltering folds of her dress the remains of Bar Vernon's tolling machine, and cast it wide-spread upon the carpet.

"What's that?" asked Brayton, with a mild look of curiosity.

"That, sir," said the Doctor, severely, "is the part of our philosophical apparatus which you have basely deflected from its proper uses for the alarm and disturbance of this peaceful community."

"Dr. Dryer," said Brayton, as he struggled to suppress a laugh, "has Ogleport gone crazy since last Monday morning, or are you the only sufferer?"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Please tell me, Doctor, where did you find that thing, and what is it?"

"Find it?" exclaimed Mrs. Dryer. "I found it myself up in the steeple, where it was tolling the bell."

"Tolling the bell!"

"Yes, sir, that and the wind, just as you meant it should. Do you suppose the Ogleport Academy supplies philosophical apparatus for tolling bells with?"

George Brayton's face had been getting redder and redder, and Euphemia's handkerchief was not at her eyes, by any means, but he managed to stammer out:

“Have you asked Zeb Fuller about it?”

There was a sort of magic in the mention of that name, at least, to anybody in Ogleport, and it suddenly occurred to Mrs. Dryer that it was, indeed, from Zeb that her suspicions—information she had deemed it—had been derived, and at the same moment the Doctor himself began to wrestle with a new idea.

“Dorothy Jane,” he remarked, “I begin to fear that——”

But Effie had restrained her mirth as long as was in any way possible, and George Brayton permitted himself to catch the infection of it very freely.

“Dr. Dryer,” he said, as soon as he could speak plainly again, “this must, indeed, be looked into; but we had better take our time at it. Other hands than Zeb’s have been at work on that affair. Mrs. Dryer deserves great credit for detecting it. I will come over again after tea, and she must tell me all about it. Just now I can’t stay any longer.”

The Doctor and his wife sat and looked each other in the face in mute astonishment as the young man rose and walked to the parlor-door.

They did not even breathe a word to Effie as she merrily followed him, and so they did not hear a syllable of what passed between those two in the outer hallway.

Nobody else did, but it seemed to interest them very much.

Indeed, as Brayton was compelled to whisper a part of it, he was also forced to lean his face very close to Euphemia's in a way which would surely have caused Zebedee Fuller to say, had he been at hand :

"Dorothy would hardly approve of that, but I do."

Alas, for Dorothy Jane !

For once in their wedded life the Doctor himself was now able to turn upon her with :

"I told you so. Now, if he lets it out we shall have all Ogleport laughing at us."

And that was just what Mrs. Dryer dreaded of all things in the world, for the Dorcas Society was to meet at her house the very next day.

One consequence, however, was that when George Brayton "came over after tea," he found that an important errand had called away his venerable superior, and that Mrs. Dryer was

confined to her own room by a headache or something, leaving poor Euphemia to do the honors of the house all alone.

So she did them.

"Barnaby," said Mrs. Brayton to our hero, that evening, "George tells me you agree with him that the less we say about this English matter the better."

"For the present, yes," said Bar, "but such things always leak out after a while. I'd rather keep quiet as long as I can."

"And are you not a sort of a cousin of ours now?" asked Sibyl.

"I wish you'd let it be so," said Bar, "for I have no American cousins, that I know of."

"Perhaps they may turn up one of these days," said Mrs. Brayton. "Anyhow, the Vernon estate, your father's and mother's, has done enough for us, and I'll be glad enough to play aunt for you. Indeed, I'll be as much of a mother to you as I can."

"Cousins are better than sisters," said Sibyl. "Don't you think so, Bar?"

"Perhaps," replied Bar. "I never had either, and so I don't know."

"You shall call me either one then, just as you please," exclaimed Sibyl; "but I can't give you my mother."

"She is to be my aunt, then!" said Bar. "Well, that'll do splendidly."

When Bar and Val reached their room at last that night, there was nothing for it but to go over the whole ground.

"It's grand," was Val's enthusiastic commentary. "You're a regular hero of romance. But I'm ever so glad you're not to leave Ogleport this year. Won't we have good times! You'll have loads of pocket-money, of course, and I always get plenty. Oh, won't we have fun, that's all!"

There did indeed seem to be a very fair prospect of it, and Bar Vernon's "old time" seemed to be drifting further and further away from him, while the present and the future, the "new time" concerning which he had hoped so much, and for which he had struck out so boldly, grew brighter and more real to him every hour.

George Brayton must have required a good deal of advice that evening, but his mother reproved him very gently indeed for his prolonged call at the Doctor's.

It may, or may not be, that George deemed it his duty to report as to the absence of the Doctor and his wife, but it's just as likely he did not.

Zebedee Fuller and his dog Bob were out by the side of the little river that night, for another raid on the eels; but, although their usual good fortune attended them, the brow of the young village-leader was clouded.

"He's back again, Bob," remarked Zebedee, as a larger eel than common tangled himself up with the line on the grass. "That young man I told you of is back again, and he's brought back George with him. Now, George'll have enough to do looking out for Dorothy while he courts Euphemia, but what are Gershom Todderley and you and I to do with Bar Vernon? We can't afford to let him be idle. No, Bob, he must improve his time. Oh! how I wish Dorothy Jane had all those eels in her lap, or, say, in her pocket, and was reaching down for her spectacles just now. There are many comforts we can't have in this world, Bob, and that's one of 'em. But between me and you and old Sol, we'll find work for Barnaby Vernon this term, sure!"

THE END

